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Amrita Sher-Gil and Hungary

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AMRITA SHER-GIL AND HUNGARY

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Plate 1 : **Self-Portrait, 1932(?)**

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GYULA WOJTILLA

(प्रो. बी. एन. पुरी)
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Foreword

Many years ago together with a Hungarian parliamentary delegation I paid a visit to the one-man show of Amrita Sher-Gil in the Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. Since we knew her relation to Hungary we all studied the unique collection with special attention and were looking for how this manifested itself in the works.

The deep impressions of the exhibition and the striking interest of my fellow-citizens have put me on towards a more satisfactory exploration of her ties with Hungary.

During the research we had no aim to introduce or evaluate the art of Amrita Sher-Gil. It has already been done by many people and this work – due to the high artistic value of her paintings – is still going on. The world-famed poet, writer Faiz Ahmed Faiz, who became acquainted with Amrita Sher-Gil's art even in Lahore told me once that she was "a genius of her own age".

If it is so then the succeeding generations return to her legacy, borrow from it, and discuss it.

We could not take on this job in its entirety. Her contemporaries still living – the Indian artists, art historians – can evaluate her whole art, her place in the history of Indian painting with more proficiency. But the exploration and representation of the Hungarian material of knowledge together with some new interpretation of her paintings done in Hungary, compiled in the present study, may be a valuable contribution to her image. The years spent in Hungary did not pass without certain impact on her formation and the mood of expression. She was surrounded by a rich intellectual atmosphere created by the best cricles of Hungarian intelligentsia. She was an eyewitness to the flourishing of Nagybanya school – an epoch-making trend in Hungarian painting. She was instructed in drawing by such an eminent person as Ervin Baktay, the painter and scholar of Indian studies.

Her spiritual world was considerably influenced by the greatest

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poet of the twentieth century Hungarian literature, Endre Ady. The contents of this volume deal with these main points. We are fully aware of the fact that the answers to the questions raised require further additions; however, in it provides the reader with some new data, new aspects and fresh explanation with regard to her life and work. We hope the book will provide a new insight to the specialists of history of art and inspire the friends of art too.

One of the purposes of the present work is to awaken the interest towards her in a larger circle of Indians and Hungarians. We should like to pay a tribute to a great painter of India who was also a little bit Hungarian.

We wish to express our sincere gratitude to our Indian friends, the members of her family who helped us with materials and advice.

JANOS VERTES
Ambassador of the
Hungarian People's Republic

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We are thankful to Mr Vivan Sundaram for various suggestions and for allowing us to see the paintings kept by the family. Mr S. Shivnath of Hungarian Information and Cultural Centre rendered a very useful assistance in composing the volume.

Mrs A. Wojtilla generously helped us during the time of writing the book.

We are aware of the shortcomings of the present work and would be thankful for all comments or even corrections.

Gy. W.

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Introduction

"Knee-deep snow lies on the picturesque zig-zag streets of Buda, that famous four-century old quaint town of the beautiful Hungarian capital of Budapest, situated on the banks of the Danube. It is a Sunday, the bright, frosty winter morning on the 30th January, 1913. A bracing, cold wind from the frozen Danube whistles sharply and the windows are covered with hoar frost. Intricate patterns, like flowers or pointed stars, have ranged themselves on the window panes, as if placed there by magic hands. As one looks out from the windows, there is a lovely sight of dazzling, glittering whiteness, a fairy scene, indeed, with the snow-clad Buda hills in the background. Such was the day when Amrita came into the world." (Antoinette Sher-Gil)

It is symbolical that the painter of the rich colours of India was born in Hungary in the winter – two things so far from India!

She lived in Hungary up to 1921 without interruption, spoke the Hungarian language as her mother-tongue, returned to Hungary many times, married her Hungarian cousin, and ardently loved Hungarian literature. She executed a lot of paintings during her stays in Hungary the subjects of which were Hungarians and the Hungarian landscape. In this manner her life-work is also a part of Hungarian painting. Some of her works like the "Hungarian Market Scene" or the "Potato Peeler" would do honour to the contemporary Hungarian painting also.

But she declared herself a painter who could not paint outside India and her individual genius blossomed out in its entirety only in India. We Hungarians truly acknowledge this and regard her as "the mother" of modern Indian painting who produced some works in Hungary too. For us the more important question is how could a girl of Hungarian mother and Indian father become one of the greatest artist of the twentieth century Indian art and how did Hungary contribute to her formation.

Amrita Sher-Gil does not need introduction to people who know something about Indian art. The books and articles about her life and art embraced many aspects and the critics clearly attributed her place in the pantheon of art. Yet a comprehensive monography on her life and works is still keeping us waiting.

The present book aims at the

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treatment of her Hungarian background with a special emphasis to the Hungarian family, the land, the people she met and the works she executed in that country.

The chapters of the study assumed a form according to this. The first chapter gives a short account of that period of Hungarian history and culture which served as a framework for her activity. The second chapter throws light on the family's role in the years she spent in Hungary. We attribute a high importance to this aspect because in our opinion the family played a decisive role in her life and artistic development.

The third chapter comprises her personal meeting with Hungary and Hungarians.

The fourth chapter touches upon her attitude towards Hungarian literature and art and investigates the result of this experience. Here we critically examine her readings and the opinions about her possible relation to contemporary Hungarian painting and painters.

The fifth chapter is wholly confined to the reviewing of her paintings done in Hungary. Some of these works are in the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi; some in the possession of the Sundaram family; one in the possession of Majithia family; and some with Gottesmanns, the Hungarian relatives in Budapest. With one or two exceptions these paintings are little known or quite unknown to the Indian public. Also the special literature keeps silent about them except the "Hungarian Market Scene" and the "Two Girls". We attempt to describe other paintings, to explain the content, to speak about the composition and the genesis of the given work as well as discuss the main features of them. Our observations and the opinion of others cited compose a preliminary study for a more detailed study on her life-work.

To these chapters three appendices are attached. The first one contains rememberings, opinions, comments on Amrita and her art written by Hungarians. The second appendix presents the short story of two of her earliest compositions sent to her grandmother and kept at Budapest with the Gottesmanns. The third appendix gives some reference to her works exhibited in Hungary and a bibliographical review of Hungarian writings on her.

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Chapter I

Amrita Sher-Gil's short life bridges two epochs of the twentieth century Hungarian history.

She was born in 1913 just before the outbreak of the first World War which completely transformed the political map of Eastern Europe and especially that of Hungary. War also brought about certain changes in the social life of the country. She visited Hungary again and again during her study years 1929-34, and finally spent there about one year in 1938-39. This last visit overlaps the period just preceding the second World War.

The first phase of stay covers her childhood and lasts up to 1921. The beginning was bright for the family and then a dark interlude: the war followed. Then came the revolution culminating in the white terror which shocked the progressive educated people around the world. She herself experienced very little from this; however, many factors of her life and connected with her family originate from these years. Consequently, we start with this age.

The years before the first World War were very colourful. In the years around Amrita's birth the conservative powers headed by the Party of National Work under the leadership of Count Istvan Tisza ruled the country. There existed also a strong opposition consisting of different parties including the Social Democratic Party. Hungary was still a part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, a personal union under the reign of the very old Francis Joseph, but Hungary had a parliament and an independent government; only the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of War and the Ministry of Finance were common. Budapest became a real capital of Hungary with all the advantages and disadvantages of the rapid industrial development. It took the shape of an international metropolis with a series of monumental public buildings, universities, museums, theatres and some modern residential areas. It had vivid economic, cultural relations with Vienna, Germany, Italy and France. The good perspectives also attracted the foreigners to Budapest, who settled there in a great number during the second half of the nineteenth century.

But if we compare the political-social establishment of the country with the relatively democratic achievements of the age in the social-cultural field we

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confront with a special paradox. In the words of the Hungarian historians on a more or less average developed foundations a very advanced but selective upper structure was functioning. These forms of consciousness manifested in science and culture and reflected in certain democratic institutions.

"The radical elements of the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia were also becoming conscious and forming groups. The first Hungarian offshoot of reviving European bourgeois redicalism appeared in the scholarly world" around the periodical *Huszadik Szazad* (Twentieth Century) published in 1900 and the Society for Social Sciences organised one year later. Also in the first decade were born other organisations like the "Hungarian Society of Free Thinkers" and the "Galileo Circle", a centre of young leftist intellectuals most of whom later became communist.

The greatest Hungarian poet of the twentieth century, Endre Ady (1877-1918), made his first public appearance in 1905-1906. The periodical *Nyugat* (West), first published in 1908, grouped the best writers and poets like Zsigmond Moricz, Mihaly Babits, Dezso Kosztolanyi, Arpad Toth, Frigyes Karinthy. These writers also popularized western literature and culture, and introduced the new literary trends in Hungary. The founders of modern Hungarian music Bela Bartok (1881-1945) and Zoltan Kodaly discovered the value of the genuine Hungarian folk music. In painting the circle MIENK (a circle of Impressionists and Naturalists), the "Nyolcak" (Eights) and the students of the Nagybanya school, in sculpture Mark Vedres and Ferencz Medgyessy and in architecture Bela Lajta led the progressive trend. In the theatres of Budapest many modern plays were staged. This was the age of such eminent thinkers like Gyorgy Lukacs. In spite of the political rule of a conservative government, the publication business was flourishing and a series of work on sociology, philosophy was edited beside the translations from foreign belles-lettres and the Hungarian literature. Some poems of the Nobel prize winner Rabindranath Tagore were issued in Hungary before the War. An Oriental Academy was also founded where excellent scholars like Gyula Germanus, Ignacz Kunos taught.

The signs of a particular interest for Indian culture can be observed from the end of the nineteenth century. The chair for Indo-German Linguistics with special regard to Sanskrit was held by outstanding Sanskritists like Aurel Mayr and Jozsef Schmidt. This glorious epoch abruptly ended in 1919.

The neo-Buddhist movement in Europe had found its follower in Hungary. A small Buddhist catechism was published earlier in the remote place Satoraljaujhely by some intellectuals belonging to the friendly circle of the famous painter Simon Hollosy the founder of Nagybanya school, the master of Ervin Baktay (Amrita's maternal uncle) and others who played an important role in Amrita's life and career.

In this atmosphere it was quite natural that some members of the Gottesmann family left the country - Ervin studied painting from Hollosy in Munich and turned towards the Indian studies; Antoinette learnt music (singing and

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playing piano) from Italian masters, travelled to London, to India and married a Sikh aristocrat Sardar Umrao Sher-Gil. Theirs was a well-to-do middle-class family, but because of the international marriages it was at once Hungarian and European. For instance, Amrita's mother had had Hungarian, Italian and Jewish ancestors, and beside Hungarian, she spoke Italian like her mother-tongue. They could afford to devote themselves to special studies and had found the proper people and proper place. It was to be so later with Amrita. These firmly established personal contacts and the ambitious nature of her mother paved the way even for her in Europe. When, in the end of 1919, the eight extremists came to power the cultural life in Hungary got paralysed; artists, scholars, intellectuals who had taken part in the revolution and the Republic of Councils had to emigrate. Those who stayed at home became isolated. Between 1917 and 1920 Csontvary, Ferenczy, Hollosy, Mednyanszky, Szinyei and Nagy Balogh of the great generation of Hungarian painting all died, symbolizing the end of an era.

The period between 1921 and 1945 was the Horthy-era or the Counter-Revolutionary Regime. The Horthy regime was basically conservative and towards the end fascist. When Amrita was a student in Paris and visited Hungary in the summer vacations, the country lived the worst period. Unemployment was extremely high and the class struggle was sharpening and climaxed in 1930. Due to the financial support of her father Amrita did not feel the consequences of the situation. The place, Zebegeny, where she mostly stayed proved to be an asylum, isolated from the regime and social problems.

In spite of the retrograde cultural policy of the Horthy regime and the difficult economic situation the *Nyugat* achieved again a very high standard. Dezso Szabo with his controversial role launched a trend which led to the populist movement distinguished by Gyula Illyes, Laszlo Nemeth, Peter Veres and others. To this period belongs the poetry of Attila Jozsef. In music Bela Bartok and Zoltan Kodaly represented the world standard. Among the sculptors Pal Patzay and Zsigmond Kisfaludi Strobl deserve mention. In painting "Post-Nagybanya painters and Hungarian representatives of the ailing Ecole de Paris became a semiopposition, and their only patrons were from the middle class...Aurel Bernath was the leading character of transfigured post-Nagybanya painting.... Post-Nagybanya art offered stability for those who could express their separation from the regime, even in the enclosed world of the individual.... Another figure was Istvan Szonyi with his warm bucolic version of the post-Nagybanya style. He conveyed the unspoilt connection of men, nature and work. Figures bathed in light reflected from the Danube, smooth, softened motives and fine but full colours placed the modern myth of village life against alienation. Robert Bereny returned from abroad at the end of the twenties and also worked in Zebegeny where Szonyi lived and worked." (*Twentieth Century Hungarian Painting*)

It seems to us that Amrita's way from Paris to Zebegeny took her away to the old country-house of the family. But Hungary irresistibly drifted to fascism by the end of the thirties and

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when Amrita returned in 1938 the danger of German fascism was hanging over Europe. The fascist-dominated Hungary frightened her and forced her departure after marriage. Her letter to Karl Khandalavala dated 1st July 1940 (one year after she left Hungary) truly reflects her thoughts and anxiety: However in reality it is fortunate that Hitler is not in India, and consequently not in the position to dispose of art and artists in this country, because the likelihood is, that were he here, I would be clapped into jail instead of the perpetuators of third class Western art of or Mrs Nirmala Desai's. For Hitler simply loves the former and detests any manifestations of good modern art or literature, with all his being. Yes, it is dreadful to think of Paris in German hands but what preoccupies me still more is what is going to happen to Modern French Art?"

After her return from Europe she was far away from war and her death in 1941 did not make possible for her to see the destruction of Hungary and Europe and the endless suffering of nations, religious communities and individuals from the rage of fascism.

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Chapter II

For the proper understanding of Amrita's education and formation as well as her biography we have to look into her family life in Hungary.

Amrita herself said about her father: "he hardly needs an introduction for although of retiring temperament, he is known as a philosopher, a student of comparative religion and a pioneer of social emancipation." He was a scholar of classical languages of India: Sanskrit and Persian. He used his inherited wealth for a scholarly life and could guarantee a well-balanced existence for his family. Fate willed it so he fell in love with the Hungarian Maria Antoinette Gottesmann, and they married. For a while they settled in Budapest where Amrita was born and then their second child Indira. The first World War prevented their return to India and from 1916 they had a hard time, because Sardar Umrao Sher-Gil could not receive any financial help from India. His great personality helped him to win over the difficulties. He was able to adjust himself to the contemporary Hungarian life, to lead a simple life and establish contacts with a lot of distinguished Hungarian scholars, writers, artists. As some old Hungarians of village Dunaharaszti still remember, he wore clogs and turban, was interested in everyday problems, repaired the church-clock, walked with the children and his big white dog to the nearby woods. He never ate meat – only milk, bread and fruit. He had learnt some Hungarian. Sometimes he drew simple people. This image emerges also from the memoirs of the famous Hungarian orientalist, a contemporary, Professor Gyula Germanus. Germanus praised his social attitudes, his friendly habits. Many times they would together go to small restaurants, and Umrao Sher-Gil would speak about Hinduism and Indian philosophy. As Germanus said Umrao Sher-Gil was an opponent of the British. It is quite possible because his brother-in-law Ervin Baktay, the reputed indologist, published the selected writings and speeches of Gandhi on Gil's instigation.

Yet another friend was Professor Sandor Kegl, the eminent iranist of the age who was working on the Bhagvadgita and the poetry of Amir Khusrav. Their correspondence kept at the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, mostly deals with scholarly problems. Umrao Sher-Gil expounded a lot of ideas in his long

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letters and Professor Kegl very much appreciated them.

About his spiritual influence on Ervin Baktay we will elaborate later, here we want only to refer to an interesting episode. In the twenties he wrote to Baktay about a poem by M. Iqbal, the great Urdu poet, on Sandor Petofi (1823-1849), the national poet of Hungary. He said that he produced a copy of that for Baktay. The details are still uncovered but it seems to us that Umrao Sher-Gil had something to do with the genesis of the poem.

A very good friend of his was the progressive writer, reporter Arpad Pasztor. This widely travelled man wrote novels of sharp social feeling and also a monograph on E.A. Poe. A monument of his love for India is the poem "Savitri".

The greatest Hungarian actress, Mari Jaszay (1850-1926) also was a regular visitor to the Sher-Gils. She was a far relative of the Gottesmanns and personally took a great interest in the children Amrita and Indira. When they left Hungary for India, Antoinette regularly sent letters to her giving full accounts of the studies of the children.

Altogether Umrao Sher-Gil was a man whose education and knowledge was rooted in the Indian tradition but he was able to bridge cultures and people in the ideological sense. He positively reacted to the new, foreign things and therefore never objected the ambitions of the family members; on the contrary supported them by all means. He was an ideal father for Amrita. It was he who managed to solve the family misgivings created by the marriage of Amrita with her cousin Victor Egan. For him Hungary was a beloved country, for the Hungarians he was a good friend, a good scholar.

The mother according to Amrita was "a Hungarian lady of extremely artistic temperament, to whom I partially owe the success I have achieved already because from my earliest childhood she has always encouraged and aided me in my struggles for artistic expression."

Umrao Sher-Gil also emphasized the mother's role in the education of the children: "It must be placed on record, with what fanatic belief in the future of her children, my wife planned and carried out the visits to Italy - which, as she has described, failed - and to Paris for their education in music and painting...without my wife's enthusiasm for the children's art training, this would not have happened. Amrita never forgot this and her gratitude for all she owed to her mother, and what she did in building a studio for her and doing what no else could have done to beautify the home and the garden, and building a swimming tank for her, is expressed in her numerous letters."

This careful education covered really every detail. In her memoirs Antoinette wrote one typical event. "It was Christmas Day, 1920. I had invited relatives and friends to a tea party and amongst the guests was the rising young psycho-analyst, Dr. Ujhelyi. He was struck by Amrita who impressed him as a child of extraordinary intelligence, most responsive to people and intensely interested in their conversation. He had watched her on previous occasions and came to the conclusion that it would be worth while investigating her character and leanings. So he asked me to allow him to make a sort of psychic experiment with Amrita. He put her in a light trance by passing his hands over

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her temples several times and then keeping them for a while on her forehead. Her head inclined to one side and she seemed to have fallen in a trance. Dr. Ujhelyi proceeded to ask several questions as to colours, shapes and figures and told her a little story in a low voice, while a soft tune played on the gramophone. Amrita did not move at all in the seemingly uncomfortable position. She answered all the doctor's queries in a semi-loud voice.... Afterwards, when the doctor had left, the great tragic actress Jaszai Mari, who was one of the guests, begged me to never again permit such mental and spiritual strain. It might, she said, have a fatal effect on the child's nerves.

"Eventually, Dr. Ujhelyi sent us a lengthy report on his observations. He told us that Amrita *had a most promising future with her nascent high talents* but that we should be very careful with her, as she could be easily influenced, with possibly disastrous effects."

She never ceased to find out the best possibilities and when Captain Bevan-Petman who was giving lessons to Amrita in Simla suggested they should take Amrita to Europe for studies she organised this. "The 19th of April, 1929, found us – father and mother and the two girls – alighting cheerfully at the Paris Gare du Nord at midnight. A few days later we were visited by an Hungarian painter-friend. He saw Amrita's paintings and drawings and immediately proposed to introduce her to Professor Pierre Vaillant at the Grande Chaumiere. Two days later the charming old Professor received us very kindly and was very much impressed by the works we produced...afterwards (in October) Mr. Nemes, our Hungarian painter-friend who was watching Amrita's development, suggested a change. He said he would take us to the famous Professor Lucien Simon of the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts. A few days later we went there. The Professor received us most courteously and was very pleased with the specimens of Amrita's work. He asked her age and when we told him he said: 'I am extremely sorry but the regulations of the school do not **permit the** admission of students under the age of eighteen.' Mr. Nemes said that we had come all the way from India to give our daughter the opportunity of the best teaching Europe could offer.... When we called again a week later, Professor Simon received us with a kindly smile and, patting Amrita on the shoulder, said: 'It gives me great pleasure to tell you that I have succeeded.' "

This event opened the door before her and the age of serious studies in Paris began. But the question who was the Hungarian painter-friend; Mr. Nemes directs us for new perspectives. Born in 1889 in Hungary was a pupil of Hollosy and a friend of Ervin Baktay who also studied painting under the same master in Munich. In the twenties he exhibited his compositions with great success in Budapest. His paintings show Hollosy's influence and are of impressionist character. Between 1923 and 1933 he stayed in Paris. The impact of Nagybanya school can be felt on more than one generation of Hungarian painters, therefore it deserves some attention in the discussion of Amrita's formation. The Nagybanya painters started from Munich but were also influenced by French art. The Nagybanya plain air painting transplanted the principles of impressionism into Hungarian fine arts.

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Simon Hollosy (1857-1918) the founder of this school lived mostly in Munich but in 1896 organised a summer-school of painting in the small town Nagybanya in picturesque geographical milieu. In 1902 this school was turned into a free school. This represented Barbizon – the plain air, impressionism, an art nouveau simultaneously. Hollosy himself taught the importance of nature and awoke interest for the great French painter Courbet. The young artist seeking modern ways of expression grouped around him. He frequently painted poor village houses, lonely haystacks in the fields and the like. Altogether Hollosy's art and the Nagybanya school are fine examples of synthesis of western European modern trends with the Hungarian reality. Thus it is not a "paradox" when Amrita herself writes "modern art led me to the comprehension and appreciation of Indian painting and sculpture. It seems paradoxical but I know for certain that had we not come away to Europe, I should perhaps never have realised that a fresco from Ajanta or a small piece of sculpture in the Musee Guimet is worth more than a whole Renaissance." Moreover it is interesting what her nephew and biographer Vivan Sundaram writes: "although she was in Paris from 1929 to 1934, by which time the most important styles and movements of twentieth century art had come into being, yet she makes no reference to most of them. Her academic studies only took her through to the art of post-impressionists." There are many reasons for that. She herself wrote towards the end of 1933: "I began to be haunted by an intense longing to return to India, feeling in some strange inexplicable way that there lay my destiny as a painter. We returned at the end of 1934. My Professor had often said that, judging by the richness of my colouring, I was not really in my element in the grey studios of the West, that my artistic personality would find its true atmosphere in the colour and light of the East. He was right, but my impression was so different from the one I had expected, and so profound that it lasts to this day.

"It was the vision of a winter in India – desolate, yet strangely beautiful – of endless tracks of luminous yellow-grey land, of dark-bodied, sad-faced, incredibly thin men and women who move silently looking almost like silhouettes and over which an indefinable melancholy reigns. It was different from the India, voluptuous, colourful, sunny and superficial, the India so false to the tempting travel posters that I had expected to see."

But this was the common fate of the sons and daughters of many nations of Europe and Asia studying in Paris and returning to their homeland! This was the property of the genius who created an immortal artistic synthesis in the case of Amrita or many Hungarian writers, poets and artists. The influence of trends cannot break through the individuality of such persons, cannot make them epigonist, slavish imitators or cannot produce an unsolved antagonism between form and content with them. The method, the possibilities, the way of looking at things are decisive factors. Sometimes the influence cannot be attested directly at all. The greatest Hungarian poet of our century Endre Ady (highly estimated by Amrita also!) spent quite a long time in Paris. He did not know French language well, his

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own world precluded the strong influence of foreign culture, but without Paris he certainly would not have developed his poetry so high.

Another point is the personal example of her maternal uncle and the friends representing the impressionism and in the twenties the post-impressionism. Ervin Baktay (1890-1963) had learnt painting from Hollosy and first came into contact with oriental culture in the same period. The family relations accelerated his change in interest and he turned to the study of cultural history instead of painting. As a painter he remained mediocre, as an orientalist he became well known. In the Dunaharaszti years he taught Amrita drawing and painting according to the conception of the Nagybanya school. This is not an insignificant thing that in the first Paris years Jozsef Nemes also kept an eye on Amrita and during the Hungarian summer vacations also came in contact with the representatives of post-Nagybanya school.

The influence of Baktay manifested itself also in another way. Umrao Sher-Gil wrote: "children get most of their ethical and aesthetic nurture from Fairy Tales. So did Amrita. The Hungarian and English books on the subjects, based or Nordic sources, furnished it Translations of Panchatantra and stories from Mahabharata (abridged and rendered into Hungarian by her uncle Ervin Baktay) furnished the Indian aspect of it.... The beautiful Indian stories of F.W. Bain in English and Hungarian...were all there." Baktay's activity on popularizing Indian literature, art and culture is admirable. He began publishing the Hungarian translation of Bain in 1917: with *A Heifer of the Dawn*, then edited the following books: *A Digit of the Moon* (1918), *A Mine of Faults* (1920), *In the Great God's Hair* (1920), *The Livery of Eve* (1921), *The Substance of a Dream* (1922). In 1920 he edited a collection of Indian stories, in the following years he wrote a book on Rabindranath Tagore, published the selected speeches of Gandhi. In 1927 he went to India, travelled extensively and diligently studied literature, history and historical monuments. He followed the traces of Alexander Csoma de Koros, the great Hungarian scholar in Tibetan studies and Buddhism. The results of this three-year long journey filled several volumes and were issued in the thirties. He prepared the Hungarian adaptations of the Great Epics of India and the Kamasutra. His book *Sanatanadharma* (1936) and *The Victorious Yoga* provide the educated Hungarian reader with a good introduction to Indian philosophy and thinking. His readable style and lucid treatment of the subject made these books very popular and Baktay's name became closely associated with India in the Hungarian public opinion. He made serious attempts in the study of Indian art and finally came out with a brilliant book of international standard on that topic (1958, second revised edition 1963, new edition in the press with some small contributions by the author of this book). His versatility proved its worth in the difficult years in the thirties when he subsisted by selling off his paintings done in India and from the modest income of his books. Then he organised a summer camp in the Danube Bend near Zebegeny where Amrita also spent some vacations. This was a meeting place of many intellectuals, artists and a group of the

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university youths. The other members of the Gottesmann family also stayed there in summer. However, Baktay himself modestly is almost silent on Amrita and Amrita's family in his writings; and in Amrita's correspondence we find only one reference to him, when he gave her advice regarding arranged marriage with a Muslim boy. Baktay was the good spirit for Amrita, a man of the widest intellectual horizon who helped her in different ways personally and indirectly through his friends from Budapest to Paris. In his person synthesis of East and West was visible.

Last but not least we have to speak briefly about her marriage. Many Indians and Hungarians were eager to marry her but her choice fell on her cousin, the son of her maternal aunt, Dr. Victor Egan. They spent together about four years and this short time was very fruitful for Amrita's art. For Amrita he was the only man who could understand her, and he was curiously enough a Hungarian. About this perhaps her husband who is still living in India will sometimes write more.

Summarily we can say that the family had an unusually big role in Amrita's life. She was strongly tied to the great family and her artistic individuality which shows revolutionary features could develop in this peculiar familial frame. This is one aspect of her ambivalence: she could not paint in Europe but she was very much attached to her Hungarian relatives.

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Chapter III
Hungary and Hungarians

Hungary is considered as the second homeland of Amrita - a place of her artistic activity. Therefore it is an exciting question where she lived and whom she met.

She was born in Buda in the apartments of the family situated at 4 Szilagyi Dezso ter overlooking the Danube. In August 1913 the Gils shifted their quarters to a villa on the Buda hills and remained there till August 1916. This was a pleasant home "where both of them (i.e. Amrita and Indira) could play about on the lawns under the care of their nurse." This was the locality of the upper or the well-to-do middle class people far away from the noisy city and also from the places where workers lived. Since the financial support of the Sher-Gils was uninterrupted they could afford that flat and as was the fashion of rich people they moved in the summer of 1914 to the "charming summer resort Rozsnyo" in Upper Hungary (now in Czechoslovakia). After 1916 they were compelled to stay in the small village Dunaharaszti where the Gottesmanns had had a country-house. The village is circa 28 km far from the centre of Budapest and situated on the banks of the smaller offshoot of Danube river.

Dunaharaszti was (and still is) directly connected with the capital by the suburban railways of Budapest, it was bordered by a beautiful natural environment presented by the Danube and some forests. Many intellectuals and middle-class men visited this place for picnic and constructed houses. The family house of the Gottesmanns was more than a week-end house. Ervin Baktay was also born there and the house is of the popular neoclassic style and stands on the main street of the settlement among large horse-chestnut trees. The house radiates tranquillity and peace: the river is only a stone's throw away, the woods are in a walking distance. The sandy soil of this region comprises partially flatland and in some measure small dunes. Geographically here begins the area called Kiskunsag characterized by traditional Hungarian stock-breeding and cultivation. Of course this is the extreme part of it but after many years Amrita could look into the middle of the same region while staying in Kiskunhalas. Dunaharaszti had an interesting mixed population - Hungarians and Germans. Because of the special circumstances her family had everyday contact with the villagers living

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close by. Amrita quickly learnt speaking and her mother tongue was the Hungarian. Her first impressions were of the common people and here she came across the animal world of a Hungarian village. She saw cattles, horses, pigs, cats, dogs, rabbits and poultry.

When the financial problems were over they returned to Budapest and rented an apartment at the Grand Hotel in the Margaret Island. That meant a basic change for the children. Their parents arranged private tutors for them. They were living in a wonderful environment which was rather exclusive. The Grand Hotel, the restaurants, clubs, the open-air bath, the promenades, the tennis-court attracted the people. The people she met were also different accordingly. The part of the Margaret Island with the special trees and flowers offered something else than Dunaharaszti. Moreover the island breathed a peculiar atmosphere which inspired artists, poets, writers, (also the snobs!), and the isolated upper classes: it was a meeting place of intellectuals.

As her mother said she very attentively listened to the discussions of adults. The meeting of illustrious persons therefore must have left some impression on her mind. We can only guess this but there is a typical event which must be mentioned. One of the best friends of the family was Arpad Pasztor, the travelling reporter and writer who published an interesting book on Edgar Allan Poe. E.A. Poe was an extraordinary person and writer who gave a new interpretation of artistic activity beside his own poetry and strange stories of horror. E.A. Poe laid down the principle of l'art pour l'art, the idea of pure poetry free from didactical, political, ethical or religious content. Her mind had certainly grasped this conception.

During the summer holidays in 1929-34 Zebegeny and Budapest gave them home and "they (Amrita and Indira) immensely enjoyed the simple village life, bathing, rowing, and lying long hours in the sunshine on the banks of the Danube. They would return from these holidays sunburnt and robust - ready to cope with the strenuous work in Paris", - remembers her mother. Here she again came into contact with the common people, met the wandering Gipsies and enjoyed the summer camp of her uncle. But the great city Budapest also interested her. As we learn from her correspondence she mostly went together with relatives or close friends to attend programmes in the capital which was a not so long journey by train. An important document of this period is her letter of February 1934. She rendered a prompt account of one visit when she met the Hungarian lady-writer Margit Gaspar (1908-), a friend of her family. Margit Gaspar was a playwright in the light forms of entertainment but brought up interesting social problems also in her writings. Amrita described her "an unexpectedly nice woman. Quiet, simple and quite sympathetic." That this lady tried to convince Amrita's consciousness can be seen from Amrita's negative answer, she said, namely, she did not want to be a mediocre in literature. She was lucky to have met two beloved and esteemed writers Frigyes Karinthy (1888-1938) and Dezso Szabo (1879-1945) her favourites "who are not mediocre". Doubtlessly Frigyes Karinthy, the humorist, poet, writer, translator and critic was one of the most talented men

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in the "Nyugat" circle who made his name known many years before Amrita met him. Karinthy had had a high sensibility of science and very accurately reacted to the social reality. His writings are unique by form and content, his age contains many colloquialisms, he properly expressed the grotesque in his poetry. Being a great master of Hungarian language a lot of expressions and phrases were created by him; his translation of Swift or Milne are now classics. He very quickly formed opinion on even complicated phenomena and had a sharp critical mind. The satirical mood of expression made his statements more effective. Amrita was also much pleased with his views on Krishnamurti who had a growing popularity in Europe and also in Hungary at that time. As she says: "Father will be glad Karinthy was of awful opinion about Krishnamurti." We can add, justly.

The meeting with Dezso Szabo a little bit disappointed Amrita. She expected more. Szabo the forerunner of the populist writers was a "strange, unique figure, bursting with energy, almost morbid self-esteem and a sense of mission, who rejected capitalism and socialism alike." He wore some marks of expressionism. His political role was also controversial. First he whole-heartedly congratulated the Republic of Councils (in March 1919) but very soon turned against it. His novel *The Village Swept Away* (1919) gives a conservative programme, praises the patriarchal order of the Hungarian village and attacks the capitalism and the foreign elements of the Hungarian population: the Germans and Jews who were responsible for the negative change. Due to the great power of Szabo's language the novel became a big success. But Szabo did not stop there and later on became an unflagging critic of the political and social aims of the ruling classes and of the regime, a defender of the Hungarian nation against the condemned German influence especially after 1933. His uncredibly rich productiveness in humorous writing, his personal behaviour and the value of some of his ideas made him an opponent of the regime and the idol of the young generation towards the end of the twenties. His periodically published brochures and his dinner parties where a lot of his admirers gathered attracted the people like a magnet. Amrita attended a meeting where Dezso Szabo, as usual, was the speaker. Amrita writes: "it wasn't very interesting. He said some excellent bon mots he spoke about the genie. We were lucky to be present, for it was very seldom that he spoke in front of an audience."

It is difficult to ascertain why Amrita mentioned these two persons together with the same attributes. There are many divergencies between them. Dezso Szabo's nationalism, occasionally with antisemitism, would have discouraged Amrita. But it did not happen. On the other hand Karinthy was interested in the life of the big city not in that of the village. He was indifferent to the so-called great questions of the nation, an ever-present problem with Szabo. Most probably the great intellectual power of their personality, their extensive spiritual efforts, their irresistible, satirical writings and diction called forth her great enthusiasm. The role of the unrestrained and sometimes even licentious genius certainly made impact on her. It is remarkable that the other contemporary

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writers Mihaly Babits and Dezso Kosztolanyi the "learned poets" with their fine language and classical form did not interest her and this has its explanation in the fact that Amrita generally did not like the classical forms; she had a poor opinion even about the Renaissance!

She did not feel comfortable among Hungarian youths of her own social class. It sounds out from the same letter: "At the Barczys it was a young people's get together, and imagine! I represented old age there – the age of others started with 15. But that by itself wouldn't have been so bad, yet the trouble was that they were all extremely stupid and green. It was funny I felt so empty, and so lonely that the feeling was peculiar! I felt depressed, although we had 19 year olds also present. I would never have thought that I had moved so far from 'Youth'."

The visits to two private collections of paintings were interesting but did not impress her much since this was classical, traditional painting and she was constantly searching for the new, the modern, the unusual.

In 1938 she came to Hungary again and married her cousin Dr Victor Egan. This was the time of discovery of Kiskunhalas where her husband spent the period of his compulsory military service. Kiskunhalas the typical country-town of the Grand Hungarian Flatland is also a part of the Kiskunsag inhabited by a characteristic Hungarian population. This place got near to her heart! She writes about this to Karl Khandalavala: "I am not at present there (at Budapest), having followed my husband like a good Indian wife to where he is stationed for the time being. I like this place, it is called Kiskunhalas and there are windmills also. I love windmills. How do you like me as a peasant maid?"

Budapest was again boring. She writes to her father, "I long to be at home, to work, to work. I feel the necessity to create in short, I feel what is commonly called 'inspired' and here I must lie, it is terrible, terrible."

Zebegeny with the landscape, with the people and summer camp did not cause disappointment. Here a fascinating question arises whether did she meet Istvan Szonyi (1894-1960) in Zebegeny? As we shall see there are common features in their art and the small locality also seemed to be a proper place for such a meeting. However, Gyorgy Losonczi, the Hungarian art historian definitely states in his paper that neither the Gottesmanns nor Dr Victor Egan knew about the personal acquaintance. As we have said Szonyi was a leading figure of the post-Nagybanya school, therefore his conception was not strange for Ervin Baktay or even for Amrita. Now we can speak only about certain affinities between them but the genesis of these affinities remain still uncertain. This last period in Zebegeny was not a continuation of the nice old days, the problems around her marriage, some existential problems and the menacing fascism threw a shadow on it. The last asylum in Hungary where Amrita could work was Kiskunhalas.

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Chapter IV

The Hungarian was Amrita's real mother tongue, she had learnt that language from her mother and spoke exclusively in that language up to the age of eight. She heard the fairy tales in Hungarian. She remained fond of Hungarian literature all her life. In the list of things to be sent to Lahore in the last years of her life we find a volume of Endre Ady ("the thick black volume of poems"). She writes in 1937, "My passion is modern Hungarian literature and poetry." As her father says, "she had read the Hungarian poets and romanticists, but her favourites were the modern poet Ady and Karinthy the humorist whom she found superior to Mark Twain."

Among the classics, *The Tragedy of Man* by Imre Madach (1823-64) was read and studied by her with special interest. To read and understand that work is a commendable mental exercise. "Madach's inspiration for this work was the rebukes and abuses from the contemporaries, which followed his inability to participate in the war of Independence due to illness. The conflicts in his work spring from the universal concept of romanticism, involving the struggle of Good and Evil of the 'divine' and 'infernal' principles for mankind (the fight of the Lord and Lucifer for the man, Adam) hence the Titan-cult, which was realised in the conflicts of the great' man and the uncomprehensive mob. Adam takes the field for great principles (in the historical scene of the drama) and his ideals are met by the respective age by the masses with contempt. Hence the continuous deception of Adam, who remains unchanged in the course of series of historical metamorphoses. The abstarct character of Adam s figure would bring the drama to a standstill unless Eve is present, standing by him as a contrasting figure by his side. The tragedy makes the dramatist personally discuss with cosmic pretensions the problems of the whole natural, material and historic world. The work of Imre Madach can stand alongside Goethe's *Faust*, Byron s *Manfred* and Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*." Her personal attitude towards Ady's poetry is well known. In the words of Dezso Keresztury In Ady's mature poetry Baudelaire s ascetic adoration of beauty, Verlaine's softly vibrating music, Apollinaire s playful surrealism, Mallarme s taut abstraction are all completely transformed.

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"Ady was their contemporary, not follower. Professor C.M. Bowra in his excellent and convincing book, *The Creative Experiment*, mentions seven poets, Appolinaire, Mayakovsky, Pasternak, Eliot, Lorca, Alberti and Kavafis as the major pioneers of the new poetry. We Hungarians think Ady is the eighth. Not only because he raised lyric poetry of national inspiration to universal heights, but also because he arched our age's poetic metaphysics of over dizzying ancient depths..... But only one or two of Ady's poems have been successfully and adequately translated, and these are only valid and really understandable in terms of his whole poetry: his life work has rightly been called the creation of a poetic cosmos in which everything is related to everything else and the whole is more than the sum of its parts. And who would dare, or wish, or be able to undertake to translate the whole?" Thanks to her mother tongue Amrita could read Ady in original! Her love for his poetry was very strong and she many times touched upon the experience coming from reading Ady's poems. In a letter to her mother in 1935 she wrote: "Please don't read 'Margita Wants to Live' by Ady. These poems are among his weakest ones. He has so many of divine short poems, it would be a pity for us to spoil our illusions about a great poet on account of his poorer poems." Somewhere else she said; "I didn't take any books, exception of a few Prousts along (not even my bible Ady)..." and in a letter to her father "I also read a lot of Karinthy it is pity you do not master Hungarian perfectly you *lose immense amount, more than you ever would think, not to speak of Ady's poetry.*"

Her experience in Hungarian painting is a complicated problem. She herself directly never refers to this point. In her youth she was certainly influenced by Ervin Baktay who instructed her in drawing according to the conception of the Nagybanya school. Her contact with the artists living in Zebegeny is not quite clear. Vivan Sundaram observes in his study that Amrita was greatly interested in the work of the "naive" artists "as well in the work of Istvan Szonyi, leader of the populist school" and "there are some interesting correspondences in attitude between Amrita and Szonyi, as well as a similarity in some of their paintings." From the thirties onwards he created works by the Danube at Zebegeny. "These works have an opalescent quality and are free of any formalist elements – they simply show the artist's joy at the view before his eyes. The harmony between man and nature, the discovery of the everyday joys of family and village life exclude the problems of society and the historical period from the artist's preoccupations." Geeta Kapur mentions her interest in "primitive painting" also, "In Hungary she lived in the country, where she came into contact with painters with such a sensibility." Miklos Losonczi goes further and refers to her spontaneous "relatives" in Hungarian painting. "Her picture 'Swing' was inspired by the 'Swinging Krishna' a miniature by Pal Merse Szinyei, and the memory of her own swinging in Dunaharaszti. The brown colour – like on the works of Mihaly Munkacsy – means the wisdom and calmness.

"Neither Istvan Szonyi nor she has painted fresco, so besides the landscape of Zebegeny which touched both of

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them, the feeling of want in their art links the two painters together. Her brave code system reminds us of the sovereignty of Tivadar Csontvary Kosztka. They are companions in the total exploration and recognition of the objects, the intensity of power of expression – the similarity lies in the method and not in the motives. While Csontvary represented the world with a Cedar tree, Amrita used the symbol of the elephant. Both of them live deeply together with their surroundings and they paint only those which they possess. The typographical variety of their art of painting is similar – it bridges the distance between Kiskunhalas and Simla and between Selmecbanya and Morocco respectively. Both of them paint the basic centres of the already given life with an excitement of their first discovery. Both Csontvary and Amrita started from Hungary and arrived in Europe and Asia with the demand of the total winning of human pentitude."

A series of thought-provoking ideas emerge from this opinion. Some of them are disputable; some are quite convincing.

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Chapter V

There is a consensus among the art historians and critics commenting on Amrita's paintings done in Hungary about the divergence of these works from the paintings executed in India. They are "entirely European in their colour, mood and sensibility." In the following pages we are going to represent the most important ones in detail and to speak about the genesis of these works, and to introduce the less known pieces to the reader.

These paintings are kept at the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, or possessed by private persons. A lot of them were never exhibited and there is no reference to them in the Indian literature. The distribution of paintings is as follows:

I. National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi

1. Girl in Field, 1932 (According to a list published in book *Amrita Sher-Gil* by V. Sundaram, Geeta Kapur et al. we could not trace it)
2. Boat, 1934 (Plate no. 8)
3. Klara Szepessy, 1934 (Plate no. 9)
4. My Grandmother, 1934 (Plate no. 3)
5. The Potato Peeler, 1938 (Cover photo)
6. Hungarian Market Scene 1938(?) (Plate no. 6)
7. Nude, 1938(?) (Plate no. 10)
8. Hungarian Peasant, 1939(?) (Plate no. 7)
9. The Merry Cemetery, 1939 (Plate no. 14)
10. Winter, 1939 (At present with the Prime Minister of India) (Plate no. 4)

II. Mr. Sundaram, New Delhi

1. Hungarian Village Church, 1932
2. Hungarian Church Steeple, 1938(?)
3. Two Girls, 1939(?)

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III. Mrs Erno Gottesmann, born Viola Egan, Budapest

1. Gipsy Girl from Zebegeny, 1932(?) (Plate no. 12)
2. Portrait of Victor Egan, 1932(?) (Plate no. 11)
3. Portrait of Mrs Erno Gottesmann, Viola Egan, 1934(?) (Plate no. 2)
4. Self-Portrait, 1932(?)

(There is an English calendar from India kept by Mrs Gottesmann which contains some paintings: "The Church of Zebegeny", the portrait of Sardar Umrao Sher-Gil and a self-portrait (According to Gyorgy Losonczi))

IV. D.S. Majithia

1. Hungarian Market Scene (Copy by the artist)

V. Dr Victor Egan (Sardar Nagar, District Gorakhpur)

1. Portrait of Victor Egan in military uniform, 1938(?)

The **Gipsy Girl from Zebegeny** 1932(?) (Pl. 12) is an early painting from the study years done in the Hungarian village Zebegeny during the summer vacation. She was keenly interested in common people of the village and the peculiar features of Gipsy people did not escape her attention (cf. her canvas "Two Girls"). The Gipsies being probably of Indian origin reminded her certain wandering tribes of India and also their language could awake some reminiscences. They were in fact the daughters and sons of nature; the outcasts of the Hungarian society. This picture evidently bears witness to the alleged influence of Gaugin on Amrita in this period. The girl is sitting - this is a characteristic position with Amrita - and the oriental complexion of the girl's face is outstanding. Also as a striking feature can be considered the stout arms which are almost the same as the legs. The basket with fruits refers to the occupation of the girl, she looks like a vendor. The picture reveals a kind of melancholy but we feel the "stopping energy" in the body of the girl taking rest for a short time. Gyorgy Losonczi justly compares this painting with the "Banana-Sellers" (1937) where Indian girls of Ajanta-type-face appear, the brown soil occurs and holds the "Gipsy Girl from Zebegeny" a preliminary study of the "Banana-Sellers". Certainly she was searching the new and it was so especially in the study years. As Geeta Kapur says "Her paintings except for the few brilliantly successful ones, are groping." For us the recurring motive is of interest as it means namely she carried on with her the ideas and figures probably first conceived in Hungary and in her later years she returned to them in a more perfect form.

The **Portrait of Victor Egan** (1932?) (Pl. 11) is the first portrait of Dr Victor Egan, Amrita's cousin and later on her husband. The face of the young man radiates peace of mind, strong recollectedness and truly corresponds with the description given by his sister (Mrs. E. Gottesmann, born Viola Egan). She said Victor was a tall and good-looking, but not sweet-looking man. He

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wears a broad-brimmed hat and an overcoat. The great mass of the low-keyed garment and the blue background both focus our attention to the face which is almost in the centre of the canvas.

In the portrait of **Mrs Gottesmann** from 1934(?) Gyorgy Losonczi recognised the marks of the Hungarian group of painters "Nyolcak" as to the composition with a three-dimensional quality and also as to the proportion of colours. The position of the hand of the figure is particular. The right hand takes the position defined by the *Shilpashastras gajahastamudra* "the state of the elephant's trunk". This *mudra* mostly occurs with Shiva Nataraja, the dancing Shiva. This is the first example where Amrita painted "speaking hand", later she uses this motive. It would be difficult to explain the exact meaning of it here. It seems to be rather a formal than a content element because the position of the sitting woman involves this natural mode of placing the hand on the knee.

There is a self-portrait among the paintings with the Gottesmanns which deserves some remarks. We simply quote Losonczi: "Pure and true sensualism can be read on her falling black hair and the playful smile of her round eyes. Her look is full of expectant desire and the ash-coloured background blunts the expressive gestures of her fiery-red lips, the message of a girl becoming woman."

The **Hungarian Village Church**, (1932) shows a two-steepled church. The surrounding is the greyish, stormy sky. From this luring background rises the view of the church with its white walls and red steeples. (Its towers are of different height.) The portal with its intersecting roof is only symbolical. Amrita was inspired by the church of Zebegeny while doing this canvas. The monotony of the picture is broken by the red steeples. No human figure is visible. The uniquely beautiful church justly fascinated Amrita during the summer vacation.

Boat, 1934 (Pl. 8). The deep and unusually broad boat without hoars is rolling on the water reproducing the different tones of the green colour. The white background in the upper part of the painting is perhaps the quicksand. This seems to be suggested by the images of trees, houses reflected by the surface of the water. The reflected image of the reddish-brown boat makes the form of the boat longer. The picture of the boat painted from a top-view spreads calmness and loneliness at the same time.

Klara Szepessy, 1934 (Pl. 9). There are two portraits: Klara Szepessy and her grandmother. As usual Amrita painted her cousin in a sitting position. The picture shows a bright tone which perfectly corresponds with the youth of the woman.

My Grandmother, 1934 (Pl. 3). Amrita was very deeply attached to her Hungarian grandmother. She wrote to her from Simla and also sent two paintings. This affection manifests itself in this painting which portrays a jovial old woman. It is striking that she is lineated with great accuracy, almost naturalistically, the wrinkles, the crow's feet, the dress of the woman or even her necklace. This phenomenon makes the composition different from Amrita's portraits.

The Potato Peeler, 1938 (jacket cover) depicts a woman dressed in a black or dark-blue striped garment

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sitting in front of a greenish background. She is peeling a piece of potato with knife. Her head somehow sorrowfully looks down. One may have the feeling she does not look at the potato. Beside her there are green paprika and some vegetables and a water-jar on a shelf or small table. The gloomy colours and the big hands roughened by the too much physical work create sorrow in the beholder. The potato is a staple food in Hungary and especially it was that for the lower classes before the Liberation. The potato peeling was a routine chore in the peasant household. Amrita observed her potato peeler peasant worman as is the case of poor Indian villagers, and painted her. This work is realistic, typical and not free from emotion.

The Hungarian Market Scene, 1938(?) in NGMA is her most well-known canvas, the genesis of which is told by Amrita herself. She wrote to Karl Khandalavala on 9th Nov. 1938: "I am going to paint a picture, a village church in the background, a market place with little figures in black, the sky grey and the church tower white. Rather Breughelesque, I imagine it. Do you know the work of Breughel the Elder? I have developed a regular passion for it."

How far she was longing to know more about Breughel is clear from a letter to her parents of 9th Nov. 1938: "I should like to see Austria and Germany. There are lots of Breughel pictures there that I am absolutely thirsting to see."

Here Amrita painted the market of the Hungarian market-town Kiskunhalas during the autumn or winter. In the left half of the picture the white church towers in the sky painted with dark tones. Beside that greyish-yellow buildings close the horizon. In the foreground the market moves on turbulently, more precisely the last hour of the market when everybody has already sold or bought. An old man resting on a stick is talking to old woman wearing a black kerchief, a typical mode of dressing of old village-women. Of their faces only the noses made reddish by the chilly weather are visible. A hay-cart is coming, two horses draw it, the driver wears a wide sheepskin-coat reaching down to the heels – the typical costume of the Hungarian Great Plain – with a whip in his hand. A man is carrying a sack in the hinderpart the right side. A little bit closer to the underpart red apples (beloved fruit in Hungary) look red from a barrow, and resemble the face of the woman which is red because of cold. In the left side a woman wearing many skirts, according to the traditional Hungarian fashion, takes out her luncheon pack. The peasant with pipe sitting on a barrow appears as a central figure of the painting. The grey hair and moustache indicate his face, his head is covered by a fur-cap. Beside him on the ground there are glaring carrots, cabbages and pumpkins. The resting old man is so typical Hungarian figure as also the woman wearing a red skirt who is resting on a barrow. On her shoulder there is the Hungarian folk-costume, a thich black woollen shawl is so realistically painted that one can feel the warmth of it. The whole picture is vivid, the details are naturalistic and true. We can say that the inspiration from Breughel apart from Amrita was imbued with the love towards the common people, the scenes offered us simple everyday life in India and also in Hungary. This is why she painted

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scenes only in India and Hungary; besides the numerous portraits in France, India and Hungary. Hungary meant a second homeland for her. The Hungarian scholars having reviewed this work formed the highest opinion.

Charles Fabri remarked: "Anyone familiar with Hungarian painting must include these (e.g. this and the *Woman Peeling Potato*) among its masterpieces, just as her works painted on her return to India are masterpieces of contemporary Indian painting.

Gyorgy Losonczi even puts this composition among the works of the painters of the Hungarian Alfold (Plain) like F. Medgyessy, I. Nagy and Istvan D. Kurucz.

Nude (or Female torso), 1938. This is one peculiar piece among the numerous similar works. The girl is standing in front of a drapery of blue-black ground tint decorated with yellow and red flowers. The face and the arms are brownish and vary from the body painted with a lighter tone. The face is regularly round dominated by the big, glittering white eyes. The presentation of the hair is merely symbolical, the figure purses up her lips with airs and graces. The enormously big ear is strange. The lifeless arms and the motionless body are contrasted only by the glancing look which gives some life to the figure.

Hungarian Church Steeple, 1938. The composition is built up on a strong contrast effect. The background here is also the greyish-white sky from which the church emerges with its tower showing a special tone consisting of the tones of the yellow, grey and white. The heaven-aspiring dark steeple is similar to the leafless, black, curved branches of the tree in the foreground. These two elements: the church and the tree dominate the picture. The winter is long in Hungary and one can see such trees for months under the grey sky. However, the painting is not monotonous because the roofing-tiles shine forth in the foreground and contrast with the rough-and-ready picture of the houses, some of them are painted very detailfully. The houses appear as brown-claret-coloured marks or spots nothing else is visible but their roof. The church is identical with the church painted in the canvas "Hungarian Market Scene. The artist painted it from a different point of view. The few tones are able to express the colours of the foggy market-town in winter and make a splendid total effect.

Hungarian Peasant, 1939. The painting represents a typical old Hungarian peasant with sun-dried face and hands. He is wearing a greenish shirt and his eyes are also greenish, even the white of the eye. Amrita emphasized the thick nose with black contours. The peasant with pipe in hand has a walrus moustache. The vigilant eyes and the fact that the moustache almost covers the mouth also characterize the inhabitants of the Great Hungarian Plain These people are sharp-eyed, knowing even the smallest secrets of nature, but extraordinarily soft-spoken. The face and the posture of the man reflects the unfatigued power and energy of the Hungarian peasants never subdued by the unfavourable events and adversities of the history. It is very likely that Amrita got the inspiration to paint this figure separately while studying and painting the "Hungarian Market Scene.

The Merry Cemetery, 1939. The title of the painting is also curious. We come

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closer to the meaning of the composition if we keep in mind that according to the Christianity the earthy life is followed by the afterlife and finally comes the resurrection. The inscription on the gates of Hungarian cemeteries "Feltamadunk!" (We shall rise again) proclaims this idea. The dead man is also called "happy" which means he is happy after a troublesome earthy life. From the medieval times the cemetery is situated near the church. In this picture a small chapel can be seen with the stations of the Cross marked by white small houses. People dressed in black clothes are hurrying in front of the stations. The sky is almost dark, nearly black. In the forepart crosses made of wood, stone and iron are standing. Some are bent down. Amrita painted on one of them the common Hungarian inscription "Itt nyugszik" (Here lies...) and on some the name of the deceased persons: Glaser Jozsef, Glaser Jozsefne, Glaser Franciska. The burial-mounds are merely a sketch and they look dim in the greenish, brownish surrounding. In the underpart of the canvas a fresh bunch of narcissus blooms in white and yellow colours and a little bit far there is a red tulip on a grave. These motives sharply contradict the leafless trees and the obvious winter scene because such flowers bloom in Hungary only in spring in the months March-April-May. The great Christian festival the Easter – when the Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ – is regularly held in March-April. Therefore in Amrita's work these flowers have a symbolical meaning. They convey the message of spring in the midst of winter, the message of resurrection from death. As we know Amrita was baptized, her mother was catholic. She may have heard something about the Christian teaching and since she lived together with Christians in the small village Zebegeny she must have experienced the funerals and visited the cemetery. This painting once more advocates the genius of Amrita because she succeeded to find a typical subject and painted it with great skill like a great Hungarian Christian artist. After many years in India she could perceive, assimilate and recreate this vision in magnificent form!

Winter, 1939. The painting shows a snow-covered Hungarian landscape, the monotonous whiteness of which is broken only by the leafless trees and pole supporting electric wires. In the almost lifeless countryside the life is represented by a black crow put in the centre of the composition, a bird which is at home equally in Hungary and India. The vicinity of man is expressed by the house situated near the border of the horizon.

The white, lifeless winter landscape inspired many Hungarian painters too. The name of Istvan Szonyi just occurs to us with his work "Funeral in Zebegeny". Another fine example of winter scenes is that of Aurel Bernath, the leader of post-Nagybanya school.

Two Girls, 1939(?). There are two nude girls juxtaposed in the painting. The composition, as is usually with Amrita, is based on the contrast of the figures. It derives from their position and colour of skin. The white girl is standing numb legs, provokingly looks at the world with her striking blue eyes having a geometric form and unbelievable blue colour. The dark girl is painted with soft, rounded contours This contrast gets a

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further affirmation by the position of hands which indicate exhibitionism with the white and shy, self-imposed seclusion with the dark one. The white cover around her makes this feeling even stronger. In spite of this there is no irreconciliable opposition between them as to the character. It is shown by Amrita with the representation of the special gesture of the hand of the white girl which is laid on the shoulder of the dark. Of course there is scope for research into the deeper meaning of this work.

Thus we can speak about certain features of the paintings done by Amrita in Hungary. She visited relatively few localities of the country, therefore her inspiration is bound to few places like Dunaharaszti, Zebegeny, Kiskunhalas. Her remembrance of the stay in Dunaharaszti is in her system of motives, Zebegeny is immortalized with three paintings, Kiskunhalas with two. Sometimes the same thing fascinated her and drove her to paint two pictures with some changes of point of view, this is the case of the Church in Zebegeny, the Church of Kiskunhalas. Some persons like Dr Victor Egan, some objects like a boat which she painted perhaps twice. (One can be seen in NGMA; another copy reported by the special number of USHA p. 81 could not be traced by us.) Certain people, for instance the Gipsies also motivated her two times in Hungary.

Her choice of subjects shows her deep knowledge of typical Hungarian problem, and her special attitude towards the simple events, common people which she found worthy to be painted in both countries. Her Hungarian education, the experiences accumulated there facilitated the proper expression of her message. However she was the daughter of an Indian aristocrat and was never in want of money. She realised the hidden values of the village culture. This recognition in her age was definitely progressive, enough to think of the realistic Indian literature headed by Prem Chand and the populist movement in Hungary which affected the literature, painting, and the social sciences.

Her colours in the "Hungarian" pictures are different from the "Indian" ones. A special tone is the mixture of green-black-grey always repeating and the illustration of the sky, water or general background.

If we want to evaluate these paintings then we can just say the top are the "Hungarian Market Scene" and the "Merry Cemetery". Incidentally the painting of them coincides with the mature epoch of Amrita's art so well documented in the Indian literature.

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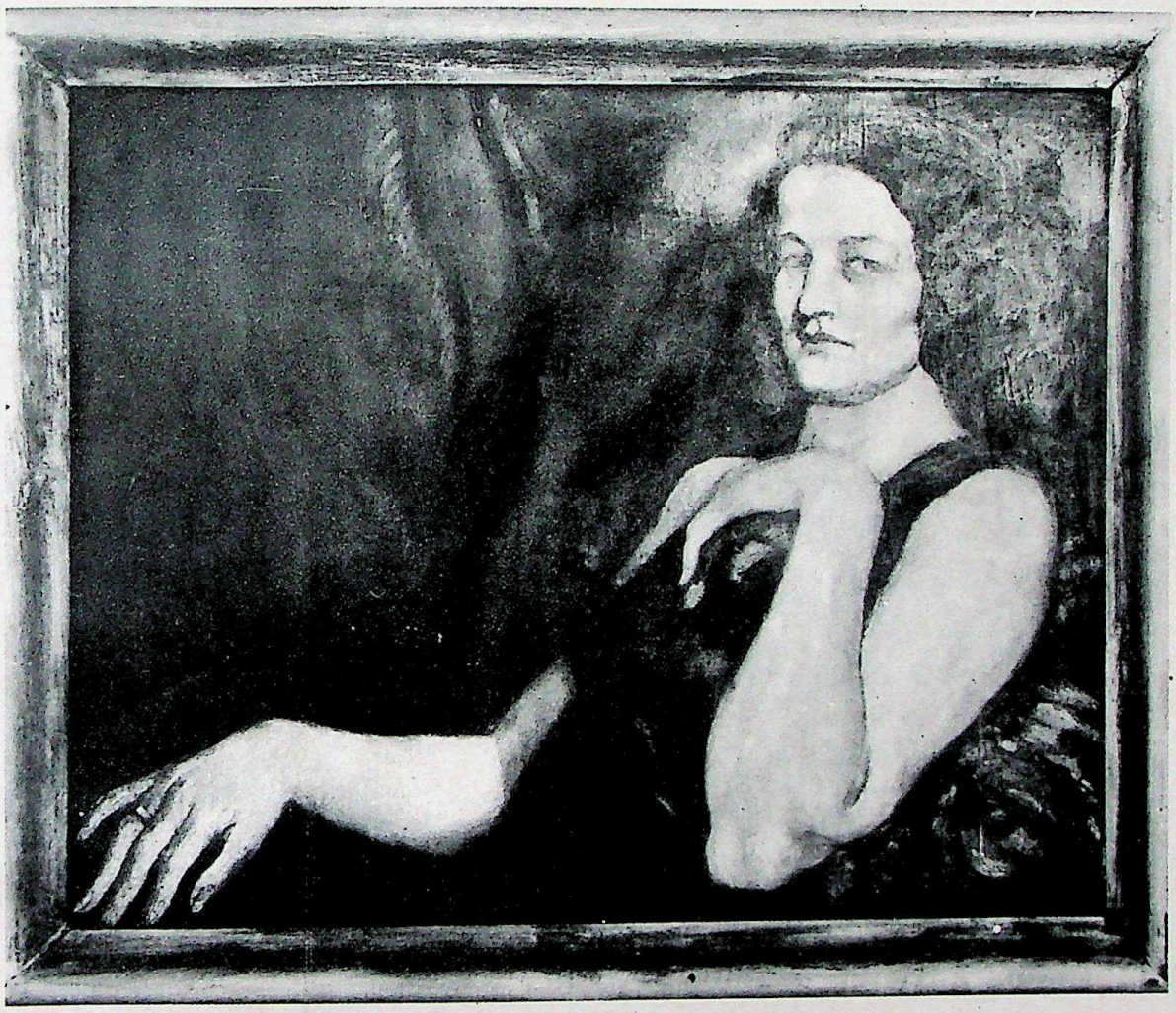

Plate 2 : **Portrait of Mrs. Erno Gottesmann, Viola Egan, 1934(?)**

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Plate 3: **My Grandmother, 1934**

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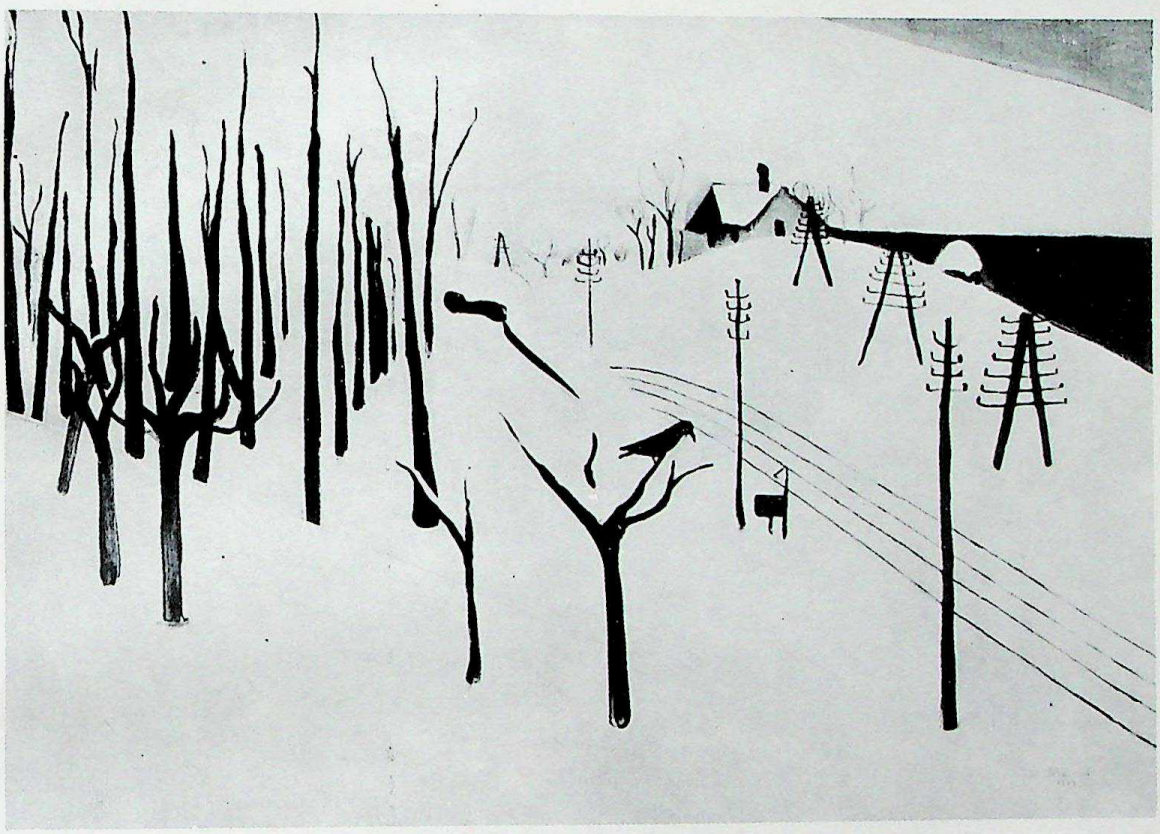

Plate 4 : **Winter, 1939**

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Plate 7 : **Hungarian Peasant, 1939(?)**

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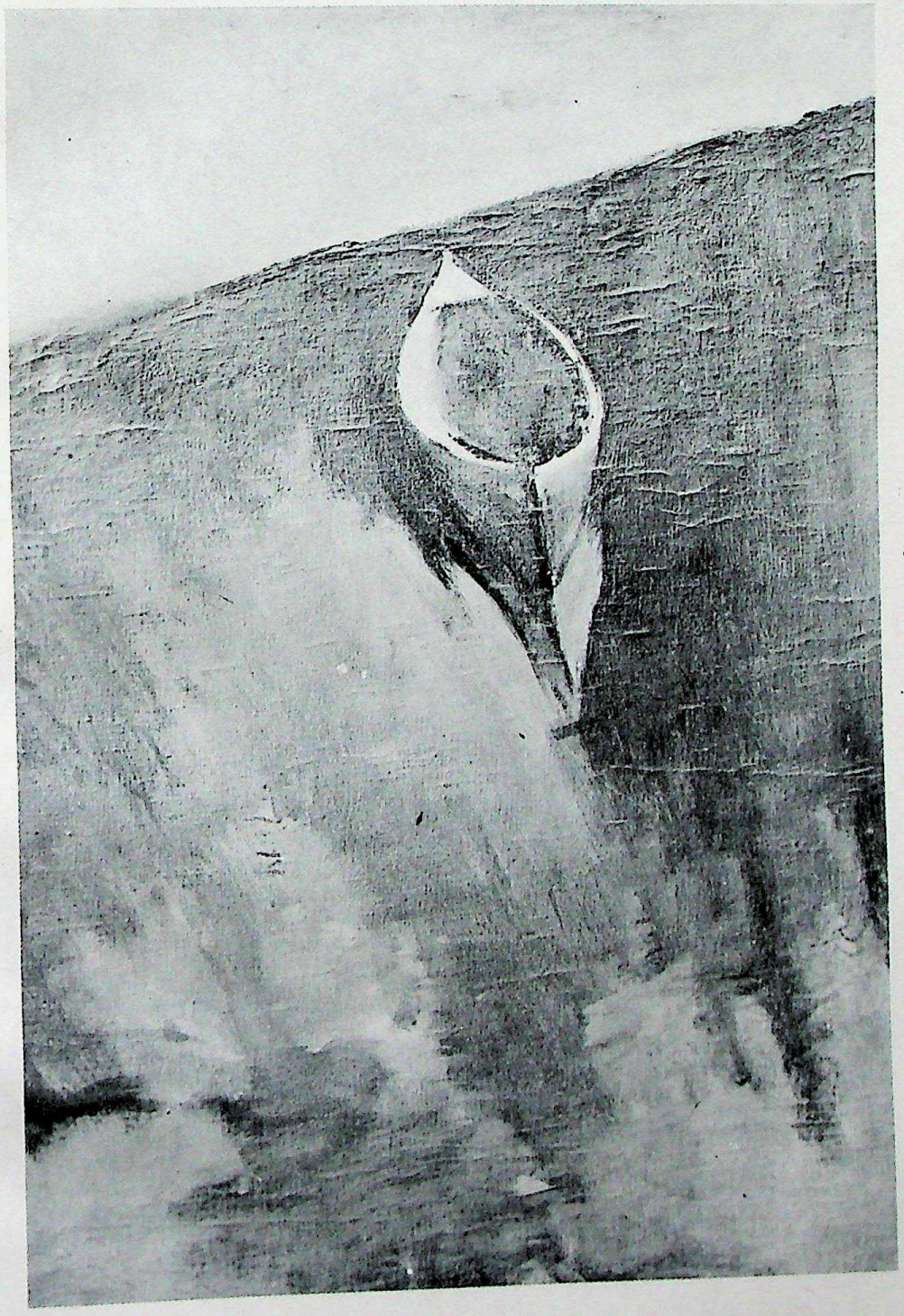

Plate 8: **Boat, 1934**

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Plate 9 : **Klara Szepessy, 1934**

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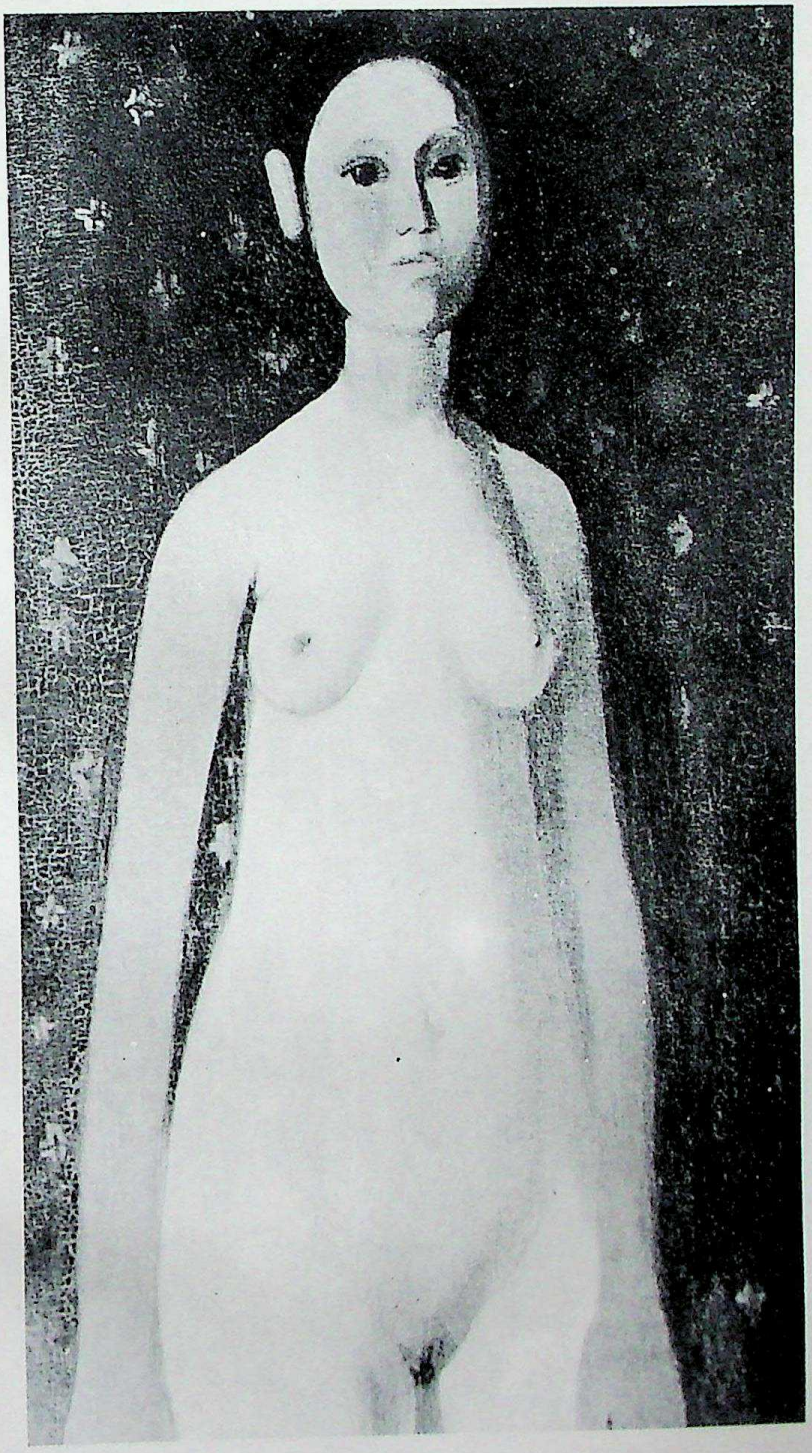

Plate 10: Nude, 1938(?)

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Plate 11 : **Portrait of Victor Egan, 1932(?)**

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Plate 13 : **Blossoming Tree, 1921-22(?)**

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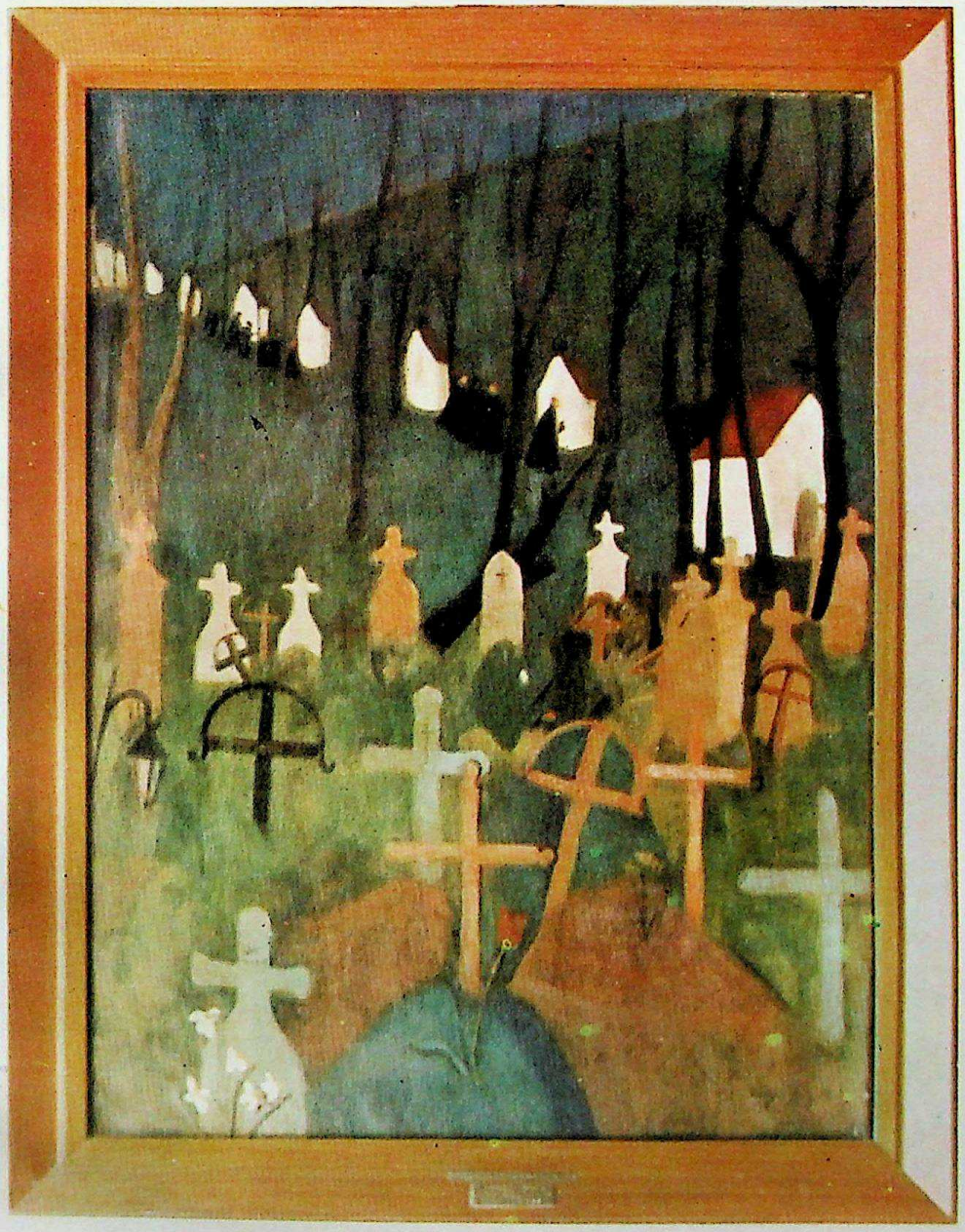

Plate 14 : **The Merry Cemetery, 1939**

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APPENDIX I

A Biographical Sketch of Amrita Sher-Gil

ANTOINETTE SHER-GIL

Knee-deep snow lies on the picturesque zia-zag streets of Buda, that famous four-century old quaint town of the beautiful Hungarian capital of Budapest, situated on the banks of the Danube. It is a Sunday, the bright, frosty winter morning of the 30th January, 1913. A bracing, cold wind from the frozen Danube whistles sharply and the windows are covered with hoar frost. Intricate patterns, like flowers or pointed stars, have ranged themselves on the window panes, as if placed there by magic hands. As one looks out from the windows, there is a lovely sight of dazzling, glittering whiteness, a fairy scece, indeed, with the snow-clad Buda hills in the background.

Such was the day when Amrita came into the world. I can hear the benevolent voice of the dear old family doctor as he exclaimed: "It is a little girl. And what a sweet one! God bless her!" A few minutes later the nurse brought me the little bundle wrapped in a soft, warm eider-down. "Here, madame, is your sweet little Amrita." Beforehand she was told this was to be the name if the new-comer was a girl. At the lovely sight, my heart gave a throb and a lump in the throat choked the words welling to my lips. So I wept out of sheer happiness. The bell from the little Protestant Church tolled the hour of noon. A new being had appeared on earth and had uttered its first cry.

She was a beautiful baby with black, silky hair reaching down to her neck, and big eyes which seemed to survey the world with queer astonishment. At first small and delicate-looking, Amrita soon became a chubby little being. She would lie quietly in her cradle, sweetly smiling at those who approached. I nursed her myself for two months and they were unforgettable and happy moments.

Soon she crawled about the rooms chirping like a little bird in a silvery happy voice.

From day to day she grew stronger and more lovely and at the age of nine months she was a sprightly little imp, laughing gaily when we tried to catch her as she ran about in her little bed, clutching to the railings. When I had to leave the nursery, she would burst into tears and would try to articulate, amid sobs: "Mamaka deje" which means, "Mummy, come". At any time of the day or in the quiet hour of the dawn she would call me to her bedside and, snuggly nestling herself in my lap, would gently fall asleep.

When Amrita was fourteen months old,

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she had a great surprise, when the newly-born sister was presented to her. Lovingly, she would stretch out her little arms and, kissing the wee baby tenderly, she would not let her go. It always ended in crying when the little "dolly"—who, by the way, was a strong, vigorous baby—was taken out of her arms.

In the middle of July, 1914, we went to Bozsnyo, a charming summer resort in north Hungary. Amrita could now say short sentences in Hungarian and was able to run about and play with the children of neighbouring friends. Her favourite amusement was to watch her little sister, Indira, being bathed. I can see her now, standing on tip-toe, throwing her own toys into the bath for the little one to play with. There were small celluloid fishes, frogs and ducks and they would bob about in the water while Amrita laughed merrily. She was very devoted to her baby sister and gave her all sorts of pet names derived from the animal world.

Time passed and war broke out in Europe. Our income from India began to arrive irregularly and finally ceased coming. So we decided to move to our country house in Dunaharaszti. Attached to it was a beautiful garden full of flowers and the children loved to play here with their little cousin of the same age. There were cats, dogs, rabbits, poultry and pigs—always a source of constant interest.

In this environment we passed four carefree happy years. I had engaged a young teacher, more to keep the children occupied than for the sake of learning. At that time Amrita was five-and-a-half years' old. In two months she was able to read and write small sentences in Hungarian with great felicity. She also began to draw with coloured pencils. It was remarkable how well she could copy all the toys around her—dolls, carts and teddy bears. Before she was seven she started illustrating little stories I used to tell or Hungarian folk-songs of which she was very fond. Later on she would compose her own fairy stories, illustrating them with coloured crayons. I have several booklets of this period and recall how the romantic element appealed to her.

When the war was over, and we could think of returning to India, we left the village for Budapest where we stayed several months at the Margaret Island Hotel. Not wishing to break the children's studies, I engaged a young university student to give them lessons. Now in her eighth year, Amrita resumed work with her usual zeal and interest. She improved her writing and started arithmetic, geography and history. She became very fond of history and developed her favourite pastime of recording events with coloured crayons and water colours.

An incident which took place at this time stands out in my memory. It was Christmas Day, 1920. I had invited relatives and friends to a tea party and amongst the guests was the rising young psycho-analyst, Dr. Ujhelyi. He was struck by Amrita who impressed him as a child of extraordinary intelligence, most responsive to people and intensely interested in their conversation. He had watched her on previous occasions and came to the conclusion that it would be worth while investigating her character and leanings. So he asked me to allow him to make a sort of psychic experiment with Amrita. He put her in a light trance by passing his hands over her temples several times and then keeping them for a while on her forehead. Her head inclined to one side and she seemed to have fallen

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in a trance. Dr. Ujhelyi proceeded to ask several questions as to colours, shapes and figures and told her a little story in a low voice, while a soft tune played on the gramophone. Amrita did not move at all in the seemingly uncomfortable position. She answered all the doctor's queries in a semi-loud voice. Then, after about fifteen minutes, he placed his hands on her brow and calling her, said : "Now, Amrita dear, sit up nicely. You are a sweet and very clever little girl." Upon this she promptly opened her eyes and sat up. She looked extremely pale and exhausted with dark rings under her eyes which, naturally big, looked even larger with a kind of fright in them.

We were horrified at the sight and my mother rebuked me, saying : "You should not have consented to such experiments on a child with such hypersensitive nerves." Afterwards, when the doctor had left, the great tragic actress Jaszai Mari, who was one of the guests, begged me to never again permit such mental and spiritual strain. It might, she said, have a fatal effect on the child's nerves.

Eventually, Dr. Ujhelyi sent us a lengthy report on his observations. He told us that Amrita had a most promising future with her nascent high talents but that we should be very careful with her, as she could be easily influenced, with possibly disastrous effects.

On the 2nd January, 1921, we left Budapest for India. En route we spent two weeks in Paris, seeing the sights. We went to the Opera and to the art galleries where Amrita took a joyous and lively interest in the masterpieces. At the Louvre she was enchanted by Leonardo's famous "Mona Lisa" which she knew from prints I had given her in Budapest. Before leaving we bought several coloured reproductions to remind us of the happy experience.

Soon we were on board the *S.S. Malva* and steaming out of Marseilles. Amrita's eighth birthday was celebrated on a sunny day as we sailed through the Indian Ocean. We had a large cake with eight candles and, with the children of the Maharani of Cooch-Behar, the girls enjoyed an exciting time. Amrita gladly shared her sweets with the smaller children, showing an unstinting generosity which was to characterise her whole life.

We arrived in India on the 2nd of February and were given a warm reception by friends in Bombay. Then we spent two weeks in Delhi, gaily festive on account of the visit of the Duke of Connaught. Our next halt was Lahore where we spent two months in the home of Sir Sunder Singh on Lawrence Road. By the middle of April we were comfortably settled in our permanent home in Simla.

The children had now to be taught English and soon, with the help of a good teacher, they were able to express themselves fluently. Regular class work developed Amrita's remarkably good memory and in particular, her love for drawing and painting. We now engaged a teacher to give the girls drawing and violin lessons. At the end of the first month he commented on Amrita's unusual ability and quick response. He would tell stories of his own fancy and she would immediately draw pictures, many of which I still possess.

Although she had a sweet and gentle disposition, Amrita could be headstrong where her favourite hobby was concerned and we even at that time got an inkling that this would be more than a hobby with her. She loved to give free rein to her imagination, insisting on her own

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colouring and resenting such childish exercises as colouring outlined pictures. Both children were developing their aptitude for music. They started dancing and French lessons and were excellent pals sharing their joys and friends and we never noticed jealousy of any sort. Both were equally loved by us, by their teachers and friends.

In the hope of enriching their experience, I took them to Italy early in 1924. But Amrita did not settle down and two months later we returned to India. Similarly, the atmosphere of the Jesus and Mary Convent in Simla was not congenial to her spirited temperament. Drawing and painting, it was clear, were to be more than a hobby with Amrita and when, some years later, Captain Bevan-Petman who was giving her lessons, suggested that we should take her to Europe, we again thought of breaking up "home, sweet home."

Eventually, we decided to go to France in preference to Germany or Italy. There is an impression that we sent Amrita by herself, but this is erroneous. The 19th of April, 1929, found us—father and mother and the two girls—alighting cheerfully at the Paris Gare du Nord at midnight. A few days later we were visited by an Hungarian painter-friend. He saw Amrita's paintings and drawings and immediately proposed to introduce her to Professor Pierre Vaillant at the Grande Chaumiere. Two days later the charming old professor received us very kindly and was much impressed by the works we produced. On being told Amrita's age he expressed surprise and interest in such precocious talent.

Soon she was immersed in her art studies. The anatomy of the human body was of great interest to her and she started charcoal sketches and painting nudes from models. That summer we did not go anywhere as she did not want to interrupt her studies. Unfortunately, she suddenly got very ill in October and had to be taken to the Sanatorium Maison Santee Perronet in Neuilly, where Prof. George Lardennois performed operation for appendicitis. This illness weakened her considerably but she could not be persuaded to take a long rest and resumed her work as soon as she was out of danger.

Shortly afterwards, Mr. Nemes, our Hungarian painter-friend who was watching Amrita's development, suggested a change. He said he would take us to the famous Professor Lucien Simon of the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts. A few days later we went there. The Professor received us most courteously and was very pleased with the specimens of Amrita's work. He asked her age and when we told him he said : "I am extremely sorry but the regulations of the school do not permit the admission of students under the age of eighteen."

Mr. Nemes explained that we had come all the way from India to give our daughter the opportunity of the best teaching Europe could offer. The professor must have realised how disappointed we were for he replied that he would do all, in his power, to secure the permission of the minister to make an exception in Amrita's case as he found her extremely talented.

When we called again a week later, Professor Simon received us with a kindly smile and, patting Amrita on the shoulder, said : "It gives me great pleasure to tell you that I have succeeded. So will you come to the class tomorrow and start work seriously?" It was a great joy to her to have been admitted to the famous art

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school, and from the very first she was drawn towards the benevolent old professor. His appreciation of her talent was expressed a month or so later when he said : "One day I shall be proud that you have been a pupil of mine." I may add here that when, two years later, her picture "Young Girls"—then entitled "Conversation" — won her the much-coveted distinction of Associate at the Grand Salon of 1913, Professor and Madame Simone gave a big party in her honour at their residence.

In 1930, we went to the French seaside resort of La Baule that summer and after a two months' vacation returned to Paris—and work. Both the girls continued their piano lessons at the Alfred Cortot School and were making rapid progress. But she discontinued her musical work for the time. Early in October 1930, we left for Hungary where we spent three months. On our return to Paris the work at the Beaux Arts School was resumed and added to the class-room routine was fresco painting which held a great interest for Amrita. At the same time she took some etching lessons. How well I remember how her little hands froze, whilst handling the fresco material and how they used to blister too from the strong acids used for etching.

A year later Amrita surprised us one day by showing us a fine model of a head of a negro. We were naturally delighted as she had not told us she was studying sculpture. Both attended a sewing class as I entertained what may seem to be a studpid and naive idea that a woman should be well versed in all domestic occupations. Such activities were not to her taste but to please me, she would not refuse.

In the three subsequent years in Paris Amrita worked diligently at the Beaux Arts where she achieved more distinction. She was awarded first prizes for still life compositions and also a gold medal for her self-portrait. This is a beautifully executed study in green, with a baret on her head in classic Rembrandt style. About this time she became engaged to a young Indian of noble birth, but some time later she realised the incompatibility of their natures and the engagement was broken.

While Amrita pursued her work, Indira was equally serious with her musical studies and made very good progress. The summer months were usually spent in Hungary which they both preferred. They immensely enjoyed the simple village life, bathing, rowing, and lying long hours in the sunshine on the banks of the Danube. They would return from these holidays sunburnt and robust—ready to cope with the strenuous work in Paris.

By 1934 Amrita had reached an advanced stage and she suddenly became aware of a desire to return to India, a wish to which we gladly agreed. Lucien Simon, although sad to part with a much loved and talented pupil, was of the opinion that her virile art and powerful sense of colour would have greater scope for expression in India than in the dull grey atmosphere of the Paris studios. So in November, 1934, we once more set our faces towards India, but Indira, not wishing to interrupt her studies, remained for a further year in Paris. Before we left, Professor P. Vaillant persuaded Amrita to pose for a portrait, saying : "You must give me a chance to keep your sweet memory alive and to be able to look on the familiar, noble features and those beautiful eyes that seem to see the beyond." When he had finished the portrait, he sent a photograph of it with this dedication : "A

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Amrita Sher Gil : Hommage d'admiration pour sa talent, pour sa beaute, P. Vaillant."

Settled once more in India, Amrita soon readapted herself to her surroundings. At the end of two months she had already painted an excellent picture in Amritsar entitled "A Group of Young Girls" which eventually secured her the first prize and also a gold medal at the Bombay Art Exhibition in 1935. The same year she refused the prize awarded her at the Simla Fine Arts Exhibition for strong reasons of her own.

Diligently she would work in the spacious beautiful studio I built for her at Summer Hill, Simla. She was always most grateful for this and loved working in this quiet and undisturbed place. It was here that she painted many a *chef d'oeuvres* which she sent to the Paris Grand Salon and for which she received prominent mention in the French art journals. Her style of painting changed completely and also her taste for Western and academic expressions. She also adopted the sari, and was obviously in her element. In 1936 came her Delhi exhibition where, again, she was awarded a gold medal and the Chief Commissioner's Prize for the best portrait. This was the same painting that brought her the first gold medal in Paris.

Afterwards exhibitions followed till 1938 in all the art centres of India, and distinctions of all sorts—gold medal at the Bombay Art Exhibition, another one in Delhi and lavish praises in both art centres, Allahabad and Hyderabad.

In June 1938 she went to Hungary to marry her cousin Mr. V. Egan. Both returned the following year and stayed with us for some months.

Amrita was a woman who stood in symbolic relation to the art and culture of her age. She had realised this for herself, at the very dawn of her developing art and womanhood, and wished her contemporaries to realise it also. Few so young had such a position and name in their own lifetime. Her one great ambition was to study, to learn, to observe correctly and to create something noble, permanent, and significant. The gods had given her almost everything; beauty, sufficient means, genius, perseverance, and an extraordinary capacity for work. She was a great scholar of art and literature, and would never read a book which did not powerfully impress her imagination. The four major interests of her fancy were mythology, history, romance and poetry. The vast amount of reading she accomplished, and the immense value of such literary absorption expressed itself in her witty, colourful, vivacious, and powerfully impressive conversation, when her eyes would light up with the emotion of the true *feu sacre* within. If one could realise what she had stored up in her brain in the approximately short period of fifteen to sixteen years, one could understand how her mind was furnished with a wonderful and startling variety of images, symbols and illustrations. Opportunity to study was supreme happiness to her, and whenever she met with a work of art suited to her taste or temperament, she would express intense admiration. Social formalities were the things she most disliked and abhorred. Her likes and dislikes were always extreme. When she liked something, she liked it immensely. She loved to maintain very often that undisturbed isolation was absolutely essential to thinking, and she would often say : "I must not even think about people's words and kind faces, but work, work,

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without interruption." Her zeal and untiring efforts, were constantly blossoming into beautiful visions which were translated into pictorial forms of amazing range. When she was engaged in creative work, she was so deeply absorbed in it that the smallest noise would painfully irritate her. So I always tried to keep the house still in regard to the opening and shutting of doors, coming-in of servants and outsiders. When she found a thing interesting, she instantly became exceedingly serious, and would grow pale, whilst her beautiful eyes wore the look of startling enthusiasm. She was a constant admirer of all that was true and beautiful for its own sake.

The influence of the sensuous has added a great deal to mould her art. With the exception of a few great artists in the Middle Ages, it has been always considered that without such influence there can be no real greatness as the mind remains arid and desolate. Although it might sound audacious, it seems to me that nothing ought to be suppressed and remain entombed in the soul of an artist.

She had a magnetic personality attracting everyone, young or old, man or woman. It was difficult to resist the fascination of her charming disposition; she had all the qualities of a pure heart and a noble mind. There was something strikingly naive and child-like about her—the most remarkable thing about her was her unbounded, almost blind trust in others, which many times led to disastrous effects.

Not being a painter myself, I do not claim to be able to give an analytic study of pictorial art, but I must confess that I remained always spell-bound in front of her paintings, as they conveyed to me a wonderful, weird beauty, so powerfully expressed in her last three pictures entitled, "The Camels," "Elephant Heads" and "The Basket Weavers," painted at Saraya, U.P. in 1941 within the short space of less than a month, just before leaving for Lahore. They were surely her giant steps towards perfection in her art, as regards colouring, design and composition.

My lack of a complete understanding of her mysterious personality and her exquisite art, has forced me to content myself with depicting my beloved daughter merely in profile, giving only a bare outline of her life and work, as a brilliant beautiful young woman, and the exquisite artist that she was. For the same reason I had to avoid all temptation to dwell upon her more human side, her humour, sarcasm, tenderness, sympathy, eccentricity, and the thousand queer charming qualities that made up her many-faceted nature.

Clear-eyed and patient, she lifted the lamp as high as her powers allowed, and pursued art for its own immortal sake.

"The artist has every right to reject or accept public estimates of her work. When the public makes a mistake regarding a picture, it is the business of the artist by some gesture to show that the public is uninformed and dull."

—Amrita Sher-Gil.

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Ervin Baktay on Amrita Sher-Gil

Ervin Baktay, the uncle of Amrita and an excellent indologist had written three short reviews on Amrita's art. They were published in his *India Muveszete*, "The Art of India (Budapest 1963), and *Muveszeti Lexikon* (Encyclopaedia of Art. Budapest, 1968) Vol. IV; and a paper published in 1937 in a Hungarian journal.

1. India Muveszete (p. 150)

It may be especially interesting for us, that for example in painting, the early died exceptionally talented Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941) Hungarian from maternal side, made her appearance as a real pioneer in the thirties her exquisite art is organically rooted in the most valuable Indian tradition and at the same time it is international and modern in the best sense of the word The best part of her life work is deposited in a representative collection in the central state-room of the National Gallery (New Delhi). Amrita Sher-Gil had a great influence on the young generation of Indian artists, accelerated the effective development of modern painting that was also convincingly proved by the exhibition of Indian fine arts organised in Budapest in January 1956.

2. Muveszeti Lexikon (IV, p. 273)

(Sher-Gil, Amrita, Budapest, 30 January 1913 - Lahore, 5 December 1941)

An Indian lady painter of Hungarian origin from the maternal side, the pioneer of the modern, progressive painting in India. She studied in Paris from 1930 and at that time Cezanne and Gaugin made influence on her. She returned to India in 1934 and evolved her own peculiar style in that the ancient tradition of India was combined with the best of modern trends. From 1937 she made a growing impact on the young generation of Indian artists. She was in Budapest in 1938.

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The Most Outstanding Painter of India

—A HUNGARIAN GIRL FROM BUDAPEST

ERVIN BAKTAY (1937)

Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, the "Sardar", the noble Indian gentleman, who married a Hungarian lady and lived in Hungary for years, was very well known in the upper circles of Budapest. Their two daughters were born in Budapest, lived there up to the age of 7 and 8 and naturally it was the Hungarian language they learned first and did not forget.

The elder daughter Amrita Sher-Gil wanted to become a painter; she spent many years with maestro Lucien Simon in Paris. After two years of study she had her first exhibition in the Grand Salon. She became the member of the Salon and one of her paintings was awarded the first prize.

In 1934 she returned to India and with more vigour started to create in the exotic surroundings. Her first exhibition in India drew great attention. This attention was not unequivocal; the young Indo-Hungarian artist also received notable criticism, as her art was considered too modern. Though the impact of her art defeated this criticism. During the past years, essays, studies, and reviews appeared in leading Indian papers and periodicals, this year a collection of reproductions of her paintings was published and a noted Indian art critic contributed the review to it on the art of Amrita Sher-Gil.

The young Indian painter has been invited to all major cities of India to have her exhibition, her paintings had a somewhat revolutionary impact on the Indian art.

For the sake of a better understanding it is worth knowing that in India – though its ancient art was among those of highest standard – the influence of European impact and that of modern times caused recession in art. India somehow forgot her own ancient tradition and cultural values and was convinced that by copying the Western forms she can serve her artistic aims best. The educated and learned Indians lost their sense for works of Eastern origin, but they got to know only the most rubbish work of Western art. The worst and most shoddy streams of the dull naturalism of the 19th century indurated in India. In case a native artist wished to obtain inspiration from the classical Hindu painting or sculpture he was considered as "too primitive" and no attention was paid to him. On the other hand, second-rates from the West could carry on in India very well by producing mawkish and insipid portraits

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and landscapes. The situation has been created even bitter as quite a number from the British Community in India was amateur painter and most of the exhibitions drew from the amateur "art pieces". Even the jury was constituted from dilettantes and it is easy to imagine their competence for judging the entrees. By and large the situation today is the same but during the past decade the art of India reborn. Many many thanks are due to Havell, the outstanding English art historian who threw light on the unique value of the original Indian art and ancient pieces.

Very important role was played by Rabindranath Thakur in the course renaissance of the Indian art and by his two relatives who happened to be talented painters. They established an art school where the ideas of ancient Indian art dominated. Several outstanding talents developed valuable and renowned art on the basis of the past styles. As a reaction to the Western naturalism they disobeyed the study of the nature, For them the spiritual manifestation, the inner message were most important. All this led to a stage where talented and meaningul artists simply could not draw, they didn't know the human figure, they had no idea of structure, construction, accepted forms. Sentimental and incoherent, tepid styles have been created as a result of this only a few extraordinary talent succeeded in producing new and really artistic pieces in ancient forms.

Amrita Sher-Gil, the Indo-Hungarian lady-painter unexpectedly and suddenly broke into this artistic world by her surprising and perturbing art. Even her offenders understood that there is something new and different. Amrita Sher-Gil is modern, in the best sense of word – but her modern style – in contrast to the modernism of so many painters – did not cover the lack of knowledge, imperfection in craftsmanship. Her superior and steady drawing, constructive structuring of forms are so powerful that they can be a credit to a male he-painter as well.

Besides the feminine delicacy of intuition and instinctive feeling, robust and expansive power pulses in each and every work of Amrita Sher-Gil. She had made a thorough study of India, on her life and she discovered an entirely new face of her country, for which the Westernized Indian or Anglo-Indian painters had no eyes at all.

She discovered the deep sorrow of India, the hopeless endurance of a lonely and destitute nation, the poverty which is gazing on us from big black eyes. She could see all this not merely because she was realistic or she intended to paint only slum inspired generous; it was the unhappy, destitute soul of millions that manifested in front of her through forms, lines and colours. This is how the art of Amrita Sher-Gil (after her return to India) became radically Indian. But at the same time her universal expression grew stronger, her way of seeing became more distinct, clear and simple.

While in Europe, she made powerful, suggestive, superb paintings which could not exceed the best frames of western art standard from the aspect of world view. In India she found herself at once, she found the inner, radical contact between the world and herself. As is the case of every art with the sense of vocation and totality her ability became an art originating from national

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ethnical roots, naturally in the best sense of national and ethnical feelings which cannot be mixed up with jingoism.

The art of Amrita Sher-Gil shocked and made nervous the artistic circle of India and she brought new message. No doubt, she contributed to find a stream for a new and viable art for India.

We, Hungarians, can also be proud of Amrita Sher-Gil as she is partly ours as well: the artistic intention derived from her talented and art loving mother; it was she who recognised at an early stage the aptitude of her daughter helped her improvement, took her to Paris. It was she to whom the credit goes as Amrita Sher-Gil, the successful modern painter of India, did not forget the Hungarian language. Further she always turns to our small country with warm affection; Amrita Sher-Gil does so when in India with a population of 350 million she gained a leading role in the field of art.

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Amrita Sher-Gil

CHARLES FABRI

Ten years ago, in 1941, passed away from among us a young woman of twentyeight, the like of whom we shall not meet again. While Amrita Sher-Gil's painting left an indelible mark upon the whole modern art of India, which is the outward success of her life's work, those of us who had the privilege of knowing her intimately believe that her greatness cannot be measured by such outward signs only. The unforgettable thing about this brilliant young woman was that she had lived among us with a mission, a divine and fatal mission, and that all her art sprang out of an inner urge, a call, that was stronger than any instinct. Amrita Sher-Gil was stronger than any instinct. Amrita Sher-Gil was inspired.

Born of an Indian father and a Hungarian mother, she had in her veins the blood both of the East and the West; and it was the central task of her artistic career to build a perfect bridge between the artistic vision of the West and that of India. Others before Amrita Sher-Gil had attempted to bring the East and the West together by means of painting; there was Bellini, there was Delacroix, and there was Gauguin that most successful bridge-builder of all, captivated irresistibly, by the fascination of "exotic" beauty in Tahiti. But these were all westerners, trying to interpret the colour and shape and feel of the East to their western compatriots. None of them could ever have been so close to the East as this young girl, half Indian, half European, able to paint like a European, and feel and see like an Indian. Some Indians, especially in her life time, before she was recognized universally, blamed her for being too western; others, including her chief biographer, contest that she was utterly Indian. These completely opposite views just prove that she was neither Western in the extreme nor Indian: she was actually a perfect blending of the two artistic traditions (and of the two civilization). Nothing European; could possibly have been alien to her, for she was half European; almost all her upbringing was western. And nothing Indian could possibly have been alien to her either, for she was the daughter of an Indian, she lived in India, worked in India and adored India.

As late as 1939, when she had already developed her latest and most mature Indian style, she was able to paint, during a visit to her native Hungary, such superb masterpieces as *Woman Peeling Potatoes* or *Hungarian Market Scene*,

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breathing the very life and soul of a Hungarian kitchen and of a Magyar village during a Sunday fair. Anyone familiar with Hungarian painting must include these among its masterpieces, just as her works painted on her return to India are masterpieces of contemporary Indian painting.

The point, however, can be made that she did, after all, settle in India, and even persuaded her Hungarian husband to come and settle down with her in this country. It is fair, therefore, to claim her as, first and foremost, a painter of India, — though it should never be forgotten that she was a bridge-builder, equally at home in the visual languages of the West and India.

To Paul Gauguin, Tahiti was an exotic and enthralling country, full of luscious and sensuous women, whom he could paint with an almost primeval gusto and set against undreamt-of horizons, strange, sun-drenched and blessed by luxuriant fertility. But the India which Amrita Sher-Gil painted was her own familiar country. At the age of nine she came to live in the village of her uncle. And what she saw there impressed her more than anything else—the peasants with their sad, thin faces, with their dreamy, lost look, their slow, swaying gait. These peasants were not strange, odd creatures of another exotic world, but her own sisters and brothers. It was not sensuous apperception that dominated her canvas, but an almost melancholy sympathy and fellow-feeling; and it is characteristic of her work that her figures, these dream-like, gently moving folk of the villages of India's hills and plains, are almost static, often sitting motionless on their haunches, or gazing unmoved into eternity. In her whole artistic *oeuvre* Amrita Sher-Gil never painted a single Indian in action, running or gesticulating or dancing or rejoicing. All her figures are like her huge elephants or buffaloes: lazily lounging or placidly moving with gentle steps. Great, dead walls, large, static trees add to the peace and breathless silence of her work. And because of the static peace and extreme simplicity of her work one constantly feels that most of her great paintings were meant for large wall surfaces, and that she would have made a superb mural painter.

Those few critics in India who blamed her for being too western are usually those who have never studied the ancient art of India carefully. Otherwise they might have observed that Amrita's work has brought back into modern Indian painting several important characteristics of ancient Indian frescoes and book-illustrations.

Most important among these is the use of great, even, flat surfaces, covered with a single tint, without shading. Gauguin and other post-impressionists have gone a long way in the simplification of their colour patches; in Amrita Sher-Gil we are back at the simplicity of Ajanta frescoes or Pahari painting, in which a face is painted in one single tint, with hardly any shading at all. The East and the modern West meet in her in a remarkable manner, and the style of this ultra-modern "western" painter in oils is much nearer to ancient Indian prototypes than the works of those modern painters of India who relish soft transitions and gentle shading both absolutely alien to the whole spirit of Indian painting in the past.

In the treatment of shadows too, Amrita Sher-Gil, through the post-impressionists, has come much nearer to ancient Indian

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miniature work or the wall-paintings than other present-day artists of this country. Already Manet "abbreviated" his shadows almost into a line; and Vincent Van Gogh often eliminated shadows altogether, as in his famous picture of his chair. Amrita hardly uses shadows; she would use *cast* shadows, often on the ground, but otherwise she would reduce shading to a minimum, and, in her latest work, it is often a single black line that takes the place of naturalistic shadows. Now this is exactly what the Buddhist monks did in the Ajanta cave-paintings or the Basohli miniaturists. In *The Ancient Story-teller* none of the human figures show any shadow at all; there is a little cast shadow under the woman's feet, and under the cupola of the background; in *The Swing* there are hardly any shadows at all, certainly none in the faces.

If these are characteristically Indian traits, in her composition Amrita shows clearly her western traditions, not her Indian ones. Indian paintings, especially at Ajanta, almost always fail on the score of composition. Ajanta is overcrowded, the neighbouring scenes melt illogically into one another, there is lack of order, lack of lucidity and lack of free space. In Amrita's work space is ordered with an absolutely clear vision. All her compositions are wonderfully arranged in the given frame, leaving empty space just sufficient for the eye to rest upon, yet making the central subject of the painting prominent enough. *The Haldi-grinders* is a lovely example of carefully husbanded space; and *The Ancient Story-teller* shows a superb disposition of figures against a peaceful, open space.

Here, therefore, is the most admirable combination of the virtues of Eastern and Western painting. Never before have all these qualities united in one person as they have in that short-lived painter, Amrita Sher-Gil. In seven brief years of pictorial activity, she has left behind, after her tragic death, a name that is gratefully remembered by all who love beauty and creative art.

She was, in a sense, a late descendant of the masters who created the mural paintings in the caves of Ajanta, some 1,300 years ago; and yet, again, she was also a spiritual pupil of that great modern master of French wall-painting, Puvis de Chavannes, whose noble, calmly stepping figures of classical simplicity in the sacred groves of Sainte Genevieve she often watched on the walls of the Pantheon in Paris. Nothing, indeed, is more striking than the *monumental* element, the grandiose conception of Amrita Sher-Gil's paintings; even if their actual size is small, she manages to convey to the beholder a sense of power, an almost heroic impressiveness that must be considered astonishing from the delicate, small hands of the fragile little girl that she was.

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Amrita Sher-Gil's Show

CIVIL AND MILITARY GAZETTE (Nov. 24, 1937)

Miss Amrita Sher-Gil is showing a collection of oil paintings (mostly of a considerable size) at Faletti's Hotel. About her paintings, let it be said at the very outset that it is a revelation even for those who had the privilege of seeing one or the other of her works in previous exhibitions, and that no one who claims any interest or love for art should miss this veritable feast for the eyes. I feel convinced that even those who shy from so-called "modern" art, will find plenty to delight their eyes in this show, for Miss Sher-Gil's modernity, far from being either incomprehensive or ugly, is fascinating and convincing. Here speaks the child of her own age, an age of striving, unhappiness, tragedy, hopeless struggle and yet a great desire for simplicity. In that simplicity is the key-stone of all her ripe compositions. Her truly impressive canvases strike one instantly by their lucidity of composition: here a large panel with three figures huddling together in the cold of the winter, there a mother carrying a pitcher and next to her a baby clinging to her apron. And then, all unnecessary detail is suppressed. Large ornamental surfaces dominate: cloaks flung broadly over shoulders (No. 3: "Villagers in Winter") where only the main composition matters: two men and a woman standing about in the cold: their faces, the centre of all expression, full of misery that speaks from all Miss Sher-Gil's Indian subjects. For she has a heart that goes out to the forlorn, the hungry, the unhappy women and men of India; with heads sunk in sadness, with eyes looking for help, her women especially have a dramatic quality of tragic loneliness. No. 11, "Group of Young Girls" is a case to illustrate this point: here three young girls, all in the most attractive unity of composition, and bathed in the lovely gleam of brilliantly chosen colours, sit and look before them, waiting for a miracle to happen, for the Redeemer to come, for the Eternal Bridegroom to turn up.

Expression and such a philosophical depth being the essential background of her paintings, it is no wonder that her paintings have very little of other background. Formally speaking, they are flat, living in a premier plane of human attention: Miss Sher-Gil's art is decorative to the extreme. It is in this direction that she must find herself. The present show displays her development through three phases; the last one is under the influence of a visit to Ajanta. I do not hesitate to say

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that this phase has not yet helped her to find her own self-expression. I find in it a phase which she will soon assimilate thoroughly: but her best work even after Ajanta shows the Amrita Sher-Gil of the previous phase, like in the truly brilliant small panel of No. 5: "The Vina Player" or in the extraordinary simplicity of that fascinating study, No. 8: The Man in White", one of the best pieces of the exhibition. But it is difficult to choose. The show is full of the most excellent material and can truly be described as an artistic event of the first importance for Lahore.

Over 150 people came to the opening on Sunday morning. The Hon ble Mr. Manohar Lal opened the exhibition in a few words in which he expressed his personal appreciation for a few selected canvases and emphasized his preference for the Indian element in Miss Sher-Gil s work.

It is to be hoped that this exhibition of a painter who can claim to be quite as much a Panjabi (through her father's side) as a Hungarian (through her mother), will not be allowed to pass without Lahore acquiring at least one of her paintings for the Museum collection.

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Miss Amrita Sher-Gil

"ONE—MAN" ART EXHIBITION IN LAHORE

THE TRIBUNE, LAHORE (Nov. 2, 1937)

For the first time Lahore art-lovers are to have the pleasure of seeing the works of Miss Amrita Sher-Gil the famous Indian painter. Miss Sher-Gil will open a "one-man-show" in Faletti's Hotel at 11 a.m. on Sunday (November 21). The Honourable Mr. Manohar Lal, Minister of Finance will open the "vernissage", and the Exhibition will remain open until November 27, daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Miss Amrita Sher-Gil was born in Budapest, her father being Sardar Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, poet and philosopher and her mother a Hungarian lady of great artistic talent, a gifted singer and musician. With such heritage from both sides it is no wonder that both she and her sister, Miss Indira Sher-Gil (now Mrs. Sundaram), showed from their earliest years a great inclination towards art. After a thorough education in Budapest, Vienna and Paris, Miss Amrita Sher-Gil spent many years in the French capital, where she exhibited with great success. It is believed that she is the youngest associate of the Academy of Fine Art, a much-coveted honour even among artists who have "arrived."

Miss Sher-Gil's "oeuvre" is essentially modern without being fantastic. Simplification and the grasping of important essentials is the key-note in most of her work, and there is a certain quality of decorativeness in many of her canvases. Her most fascinating subjects are studies of Indian women and children. She brought back from a visit to the magnificent caves of Ajanta fresh impulses. Almost all her paintings are done in oil, and she prefers large canvases. In fact, there is a surprising amount of force evident in her work.

Notwithstanding the fact that she has studied in and been deeply influenced by the West, Miss Sher-Gil's work must be considered as a clear sign of the artistic awakening in India.

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A few aspects of the life of Amrita Sher-Gil related to Hungary –

THE INFLUENCE OF THE HUNGARIAN PAINTERS ON HER ART

MIKLOS LOSONCZI

Amrita Sher-Gil has found the synthesis of her Hungarian experiences, the Indian traditions and the demands of the modern painting – that is how one can judge her artistic talents. The monographers of Amrita Sher-Gil indicate only that her mother was a Hungarian lady. But the detailed review proves that her art before her departure for Paris was influenced by the Hungarian scenery and intellectual surroundings as well.

She first saw the trees, clouds, horses, cows and calves in Dunaharaszti[1] – this is the place where she spent the first period of her consciousness, here, in the surrounding forest she had long walks with her father, Sardar Umrao Singh, who was not only a distinguished Sikh nobleman but also a painter himself. The Hungarian landscape gave her inspiration too – she has painted a few motives of Zebegeny[2] and Kiskunhalas[3]. Dunaharaszti and its surroundings motivated the young Amrita from 1917 to 1921; and she visited Zebegeny in 1932, where she has made fresh artistic sketch on a facade of the Transsylvania-inspired church.

Kiskunhalas is a separate island in the art of Amrita. In the spirit of Ramayana she has chosen "on the ground of belief and conviction" Victor Egan, a Hungarian doctor to be her husband, who, in 1938 served as a soldier in Kiskunhalas. Amrita arrived at Kiskunhalas after a longer stay in India. In Kiskunhalas, at the weekly fair "the peasants of the neighbouring villages, in their colourful folk costumes, offered a very picturesque milieu."

Before Kiskunhalas she has experienced "Indian towns – people, fates and behaviour. With these experiences she arrived at Kiskunhalas, and there she saw, in the milling market, the reflection of the Indian women carrying carpets, jugs, banana. The corn cobs have symbolic power as the old people dressed in black too, who were characterized ethnographically in a very precise way. In a unique natural way she

[1] Dunaharaszti is located on the bank of River Danube some 20 km from Budapest. This is a small village and it was a place for summer rest in Amrita's time also.
[2] Zebegeny is a picturesque village of the Danube Bend; a resort for painters.
[3] Kiskunhalas is the centre of the so-called Kunsag, a prominent part of Hungary from historical and ethnographic point of view. It is a typical market town.

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switches over the character of these peole and landscape and then she records all this so sensitively, with such a free and easy serenity that unintentionally she highlights the duty of the painters of the Great Hungarian Plain, she becomes an associate and ally of Ferenc Medgyessy, Istvan Nagy and Istvan D. Kurucz.

The most remarkable features of her artistic personality is the independence but this does not mean that she can not have spontaneous "relatives".

Her picture "Swing" was inspired by the "Swinging Krishna" a miniature by Pal Merse Szinyei, and the memory of her own swinging in Dunaharaszti. The brown colour – like on the works of Mihaly Munkacsy – means the wisdom and calmness.

Neither Istvan Szonyi nor she has painted fresco, so besides the landscape of Zebegeny which touched both of them, the feeling of want in their art links the two painters together. Her brave code system reminds us of the sovereignty of Tivadar Csontvary Kosztka. They are companions in the total exploration and recognition of the objects, the intensity of power of expression – the similarity lies in the method and not in the motives. While Csontvary represented the world with a cedar tree, Amrita used the symbol of the elephant. Both of them live deeply together with their surroundings and they paint only those which they possess. The typographical variety of their art of painting is similar - it traverses the distance between Kiskunhalas to Simla and from Selmecbanya to Morocco respectively. Both of them paint the basic centres of the already given life with an excitement of their first discovery. Both Csontvary and Amrita started from Hungary and arrived in Europe and Asia with the demand of the total winning of human pentitude.

Amrita has obtained from Hungary the essential experiences required so deeply in launching her artistic mission and it is a matter of pleasure that the Hungarian landscape, origin, intellectual surroundings and the characteristics of the Hungarian art of painting contributed to her artistic achievements.

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The Portrait of Amrita Sher-Gil

EDIT BASCH

In the special number of the *Usha* (Lahore; August, 1942) there is a portrait of Amrita Sher-Gil by Edit Basch. The painting shows Amrita in saree in a sitting position. The character of the painting is purely European, only the broad features and the traditional Indian dress indicate her being an Indian. Amrita's eyes and mouth express a silent melancholy, a feeling also suggested by the head inclined to the right. Edit Basch (1895) was a friend of the family (also a pupil of the Nagybanya school), who lived in Paris during 1928-30 (His stay coincides with Amrita's stay there!) then in Rome. She has been living in Rome since the thirties. In 1961 she exhibited her works in New York with success. She is known as a portrait painter and also as water-colourist. The exact date of her Amrita portrait not known to us, perhaps it was done during the Paris-years.

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APPENDIX II

Two early works of Amrita Sher-Gil were sent by her to her grandmother.

There is a painting in the Gottesmann collection which Amrita as child executed in Simla some time in the beginning of the twenties when the family returned to India. On the reverse there is a short Hungarian text "To my only good dear little grandmother with the greatest affection from Amrita. This pink coloured tree is in the lower part of our neighbour's house."

The addressee was Mrs. Raoul Gottesmann, Amrita's grandmother. The picture gives some resemblance of the environment in Dunaharaszti. The colours of the tree remind us of the chestnut trees around the country-house of the Gottesmann family. These trees are still standing and throw a pleasant shadow on the front side situated in the main street of Dunaharaszti. Of course, this composition is the work of a child but it suggests promising bright future.

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APPENDIX III

Amrita Sher-Gil is little known in Hungary. Her paintings possessed by her relatives living in Budapest have never been exhibited. Only one portrait which shows Mrs Gottesmann can be seen in the first edition of Ervin Baktay's "The Art of India" (in the second edition it was replaced by the "Brahmacharis"). Among her best paintings only a few were exhibited in Budapest in original (1956, 1979).

The Hungarian literature on Amrita Sher-Gil and her art is poor. There is only one comprehensive paper by Gyorgy Losonczi published in *Muveszettortenti Ertesito* (Bulletin of the History of Art) a special organ of Hungarian art historians in 1974. This is based on a careful research and furnishes the Hungarian reader with an overall picture. Certain data and some conclusions are of great importance. This is an indispensable paper in the Amrita Sher-Gil research.

Ervin Baktay's two short reviews in his *The Art of India* and in the *Muveszeti Lexikon* serve as guide for the educated Hungarian and can only be regarded as a kind of appreciation or acknowledgement. The author of this book accidentally came to know Baktay's article "The Most Outstanding Painter of India – a Hungarian Girl from Budapest" published in 1937(?). This hitherto unknown article because of writer's personal but prophetic account has its research value.

The paper read by Tibor Horvath on the Baktay commemoration Meeting, held on 8th December 1970, did not reach a wider circle. The plan of a local museum in Dunaharaszti for the works of Ervin Baktay, Umrao Sher-Gil and Amrita Sher-Gil is in progress.

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